The Bed and the Battlefield:
Gender, Sex and Nation in the Trans-Modernist Novel

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the narrative juxtaposition of failed heroics and queered erotics in the fiction of four writers from the early twentieth century: Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys and Claude McKay. Their works are read in the context of nationalist discourses of colonialism and imperialism, and in particular the way national belonging is articulated through sexuality. The concept of trans-modernism builds on recent scholarship in queer studies, postcolonial theory, critical race and diaspora studies and helps identify modernist fiction which crosses national boundaries while it also opens up queer narrative space.

The anti-nationalist politics of Virginia Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts*, becomes apparent by focusing on a seemingly minor and multiply outcast character, Miss LaTrobe. By giving LaTrobe a central role in the novel, Woolf reveals the exclusions inherent in the ideology of nationalism and posits the lesbian artist as modernist hero.

The image of the encounter between the bed and the battlefield, between the plot of desire and the tale of the imperial hero, comes from a scene from Djuna

Barnes's short story "Cassation," in which the homoerotic trajectory of the plot is unexpectedly interrupted by a description of a war painting. Barnes's novel *Nightwood* makes a similar juxtaposition; against the backdrop of the collapse of the Hapsburg and Romanov empires, her characters move in erotic uncertainty between various settings.

Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* tells the story of exiles trying to navigate their way around Europe between the wars. The 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques Appliqués à la Vie Moderne* serves as the setting for Rhys's novel. The triumphant nationalism of the Paris World's Fair provides an ironic a counterpoint to the struggles for belonging and economic survival faced by her characters.

The novels of Jamaican-born colonial exile Claude McKay can be read as a tetralogy framed by an epic quest for home for diasporic Africans. McKay's last two novels, *Romance in Marseilles* and *Banana Bottom*, are revisionist romances that complete McKay's quest--not for an unattainable home, but rather to reveal the fictions embedded in cultural assertions of a national homeland.

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Introduction

Part I: The Erotics and Heroics of Modern Fiction

In an early scene of Djuna Barnes's short story "Cassation,"[1] the narrator, Katya, describes her first entry into the house of Gaya, a seductive older woman. Katya's description focuses on the details of the bedroom, the first room that Gaya brings Katya to, and the presence of a bed that looms large and overpowering. What seems to be the erotic trajectory of the plot is unexpectedly interrupted by Katya's description of a war painting that hangs over the bed. As she describes it, the painting seems to be "in encounter" with the bed. Instead of charging to victory, however, the foreign generals in the painting appear to be attacking the rumpled bed itself.

This dissertation will examine the literary encounter between the bed and the battlefield, between the plot of desire and the tale of the imperial hero as written against the backdrop of a struggle over the nation in a variety of modernist novels. The result with be an historical and aesthetic consideration of the interconnections of erotics and heroics and how both are defined through the discourse of nation and its borders.

Modernist novels, which are distinguished in part by their intertextuality and their relentless allusiveness, simultaneously make use of established plots and conventions and they revise or undermine them. I will consider novels that combine two common (and emphatically gendered) plots--the romance and the male hero's quest. There are a significant number of modernist novels in which the expected

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1 Originally published in 1929 as "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady." Slightly revised and republished under the title "Cassation" in the 1962 collection *Spillway and Other Stories*.

trajectories of these plots--marriage for the romance and triumph for the quest--are undermined by this very narrative juxtaposition. Barnes's bizarre tableau--the combination of queered erotics and failed heroics--appears, in various configurations, in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *Between the Acts* (1941); Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1938) and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966); Djuna Barnes's short story "Cassation" (1929/1962) and novel *Nightwood* (1936); and Claude McKay's *Romance in Marseilles* (unpublished, completed in 1930) and *Banana Bottom* (1933). My focus is on authors whose pre-occupation with nation and empire has been well-established,[2] who (except for Woolf) chose expatriation and who in their lives and in their work flouted western heterosexual marriage conventions.

December, 1910: Social Subjects and the Modern Novel

The turn of the twentieth century marks a transitional period in modernity. The social landscape of the United States and Great Britain became increasingly variegated in part as a result of various migrations spawned by industrialization, urbanization, colonialism, and, in the 1910s, the Great War. The social world was further altered by women moving increasingly into the public sphere and individuals forging sexual relations and communities outside the confines of the heterosexual family.[3] In the history of the novel, this period witnessed the shift from social realism to a variety of experimental forms of narrating plots and describing character.

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[2] For major critical works on Woolf and war and empire see, for example, Mark Hussey, ed. *Virginia Woolf and War*, Jane Marcus *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*, and Alex Zwerdling *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*.

Leftist critics of modernism such as Raymond Williams and Georg Lukács find fault with modernist authors for emphasizing technique over content, producing novels that are, like the characters they write about, isolated and alienated from the social and political contexts in which they were produced. I will, however, argue that there are connections between some modernist aesthetic innovations and social and political context. The focus on the hero's quest and the articulation of national identity, ancient literary concerns, take on a new urgency as a result of the social dislocation noted above. As Ann Ardis (and others) have suggested, female modernist transformations of the romance plot are rightfully seen in the context of the social emergence of the New Woman.[4] In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Virginia Woolf asserts her oft-quoted and frequently derided dictum that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed" (96). What is cited with considerably less frequency is Woolf's explanation of what she means by her claim. She goes on to explain that in this period of modernity, "All human relations have shifted--those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature" (96-97). For Woolf, such a momentous change necessitates a change in how the novelist writes. In contrast to the New Critical emphasis on aesthetic innovation over narrative content and historical context, this dissertation will follow in the tradition of

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[3] The social changes to which I refer have been well-documented in, for example, John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*, Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, and Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*.

[4] Ann Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism*.

critics who read the novel as an inherently social text, one whose development has always been determined by material circumstance, including and in particular, western imperialism and gendered relations between the sexes.[5]

As Nancy Armstrong states in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, any history of the novel must "take into account the history of sexuality" (10). In the late nineteenth century, the newly-emergent fields of psychology, sexology, and anthropology, coupled with legal reform in marriage law and women's rights helped change the discourse about sexual identity and gender relations. These ideological changes and controversies and the resultant conflicts and anxieties are abundantly apparent in literature, particularly in novels that employ a romance plot. Love plots in novels not only articulate desire, they domesticate it.[6] With few but notable exceptions, plots about women's lives from the eighteenth through the nineteenth century were limited to the heterosexual romance plot. Pamela's virtue is "rewarded" by marriage to the now-reformed Mr. B; Austen's novels revolve around courtship and end in marriage; Jane Eyre's story can only conclude when she finally marries Rochester. Even at the end of the nineteenth century with the proliferation of New Woman novels, heroines' struggles against domestic confinement were often plotted as failure: Isabel Archer makes the wrong choice; Sue Bridehead renounces her independence. Olive Schreiner

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[5] As illustrated by Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*; Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*; Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments*; and Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition/Counter Tradition*.

[6] According to Armstrong the cultural role of the domestic woman as created in eighteenth century is to domesticate desire--that is, to confine it to the domestic sphere--otherwise, desire is a threat to society; the domestic woman thus shapes the cultural role of the female subject (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 3-8 *passim*).

radically reworks gender conventions in *The Story of an African Farm* and is thus sometimes considered an "early modernist." Nevertheless, her heroine, Lyndall, in spite and perhaps because of her gender rebellion, dies a failure. Notably, none of Virginia Woolf's novels end in marriage, and Djuna Barnes resists championing the romance plot, even when it's articulated in a lesbian relationship.

If the erotic plot marks the parameters of desire and sexuality, especially female sexuality, its traditional resolution also confirms the status of the male hero. The main characters in major works by Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, for example, struggle because the social world no longer fits their characters' outmoded beliefs: women will not fulfill the male ideal; the hero is no longer triumphant and invincible. Besides resisting the conventional constrictions of modern romance, the novels I will consider in this dissertation simultaneously undermine the heroic narratives they set in motion. Feminist critics have theorized the "crisis of masculinity" as a driving force behind modernism.[7] I will focus on the interdependence of these two gendered plots, which becomes apparent when they are juxtaposed and their expected conclusions thwarted.

Since this dissertation foregrounds the relation between the hero and the domestic scene, specifically in a historical period in which empire and national identity are of monumental importance, it will be useful to consider the rubric "epic," not as a generic term, but as a way of reading the way epic is alluded to and its conventions are employed and reworked in these novels. When the epic is invoked by

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[7] See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's two-volume *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* and Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism*.

male critics of the modern novel, such as Bakhtin, Lukàcs, and Moretti, they ignore women's role in determining the heroism of the hero. After quoting Blanchot's "The End of the Hero" that action is necessary for heroism, Franco Moretti in *Modern Epic* relegates Penelope/Molly to a footnote. He writes:

> The term hero, here, is not male by chance or mere habit. The original interweaving of epic and war did indeed relegate female figures to a marginal role, which has persisted to our own day. Joyce's Penelope is fortunate enough to have a tremendous monologue--but she is restricted to the book's last chapter. It is because of this symbolic imbalance, I think, that European women writers have always preferred novels to epic storytelling. (14)

There is of course a huge body of criticism on the differences between, and intersections of, the epic and novel and if and in what ways the epic tradition continues in modernity.[8] My argument here is not, for example, that Virginia Woolf's novels themselves can be generically labeled epic, but that her modernist manipulations of plot make overt the connection between the "epic" hero and the women's domestic role. Woolf's *The Years* is a multi-generational family saga that chronicles the effects of the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, yet it embeds its critique in classical tradition. The eldest brother, Edward, emphatically applauds the performance of *Siegfried*; he gives his sister a copy of his translation of *Antigone*,

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[8] See, for example, Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*; M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*; E.M.W. Tillyard, "The Nature of the Epic" and *The Epic Strain in the English Novel*; Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic*; and David Quint, *Epic and Empire.*

oblivious to the fact that she, too, has been sacrificed and confined for the benefit of her brother's heroic status.

Besides the epic hero's role as the warrior hero (as in the *Iliad*) or the quester hero (as in the *Odyssey*), the epic is also a genre whose social function is to document and validate the history and existence of a people or a nation. "Epic" is thus also a useful category for thinking about these novels because for each of these authors (and arguably for most modernist writers) national and cultural identity and the fate of western imperialism were important to their personal lives and political affiliations. Woolf's imperial England, Barnes's interwar, international Europe and primitive America, McKay's Harlem, Marseilles, and Jamaica, and Rhys's white Creole and homeless Jews in 1930's Paris foreground the national displacement of characters in an international world in flux.

Part II: The Trans in Trans-Modernism

When considering the distinctions between the terms 'international' and 'transnational,' used by scholars who write about some of the same authors, periods, or theoretical considerations as I do, I started thinking about the prefix 'trans-.' Trans-, as in transnational. For Michelle Stephens, transnational refers to the connections between nations, the ability to cross—to trespass and to transcend--the border of nations, whereas international reifies the supposed 'naturalness' of nations. As Brent Edwards notes, in recent years Black Studies has appropriated the term diaspora, focusing less on either the idea (or ideal) of a pure black homeland than on dispersal and the meanings that can be created beyond the bounds of nation. Diaspora provides a way of finding unity and commonality in dispersal and refusing to identify with any one nationalism, including Black Nationalism.

Since I think about modernism not as an American, British, African-American, Caribbean, Latino, or Continental phenomenon or movement, but instead as an aesthetic response to the tumultuous decades of the early twentieth century, grounded in the social and political changes that caused a change in how, to paraphrase Woolf, people write books, I consider the term trans-modernism to be a way to encompass the geographic range in the texts I wanted to look at in this dissertation—which might, in other frames be considered works of British modernism, American modernism, the expatriates, Caribbean modernism, African-American modernism, the Harlem Renaissance. I mean the trans- in trans-modernism, like the trans- in transnational, to trespass across national borders.

As I theorize as well, the trans- in trans-modernism is like the trans- in transgender, as long as transgender is theorized deconstructively. That is, as Sandy Stone, Kate Bornstein and other transgender theorists write, transgender does not imply the naturalness of the gender binary—that is, to be transgender doesn't mean wholly being one gender and then becoming the other. Rather, being trans- is about denaturalizing gender binaries, about transitioning and transcending culturally proscribed categories such as male and female.

Further, as recent work, especially in masculinity studies (as well as Gender, Black, and Post-Colonial studies) has noted, transcending nation is also a way of transcending gender. Or, put another way, the making of nations is wholly imbricated with the making of genders, and especially the making of masculinities. Witness the life story of Septimus Smith—he became a man to become more English.

In her recent study, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*, Michelle Ann Stephens writes that various recent scholars, notably Heather Hathaway and Brent Edwards, "have also noted the presence of homosocial and homoerotic resonances in [Claude] McKay's work . . . . However, none have tackled the centrality of these homoerotic elements to the ways in which we read the transnationalism of *both* novels from the late 1920s" (320). Stephens refers to *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*; it is my aim here to read not only McKay's homoeroticism – though I would emphasize the queer sexuality in all his works, even his seemingly conventional romances – and its connection to the transnationalism of his work, but to other modernist writers, and, arguably to provide a new frame in which to consider modernism.

I consider trans-modernism a useful term, not because it can provide yet another category in which to subdivide experimental, major and marginalized literature of the early twentieth century. The term does not partake in identity politics; rather, I see it as a way in which to re-consider literature from the early twentieth century and make connections that might have been missed by the more traditional subdivisions, such as high, low, popular, avant-garde, American, Irish, Caribbean, and so on. I think it useful to read authors as different as Claude McKay and Virginia Woolf side by side. I hope doing so through the prism of trans-modernism, with attention paid to how these authors in their works (and sometimes their lives) narrate and navigate the construct of nations and the discourse of gender and sexual identities and roles. I consider the term trans-modernism to be part of the ongoing transformation of modernist studies.

Chapter 1:

Keeping an Eye on the Cot: The Anti-nationalism of Virginia Woolf's Fiction

Of the four novelists I consider in this dissertation, Virginia Woolf is the writer most firmly embedded in the heart of empire; I argue that the cultural exclusions of empire are made abundantly apparent in her novels. My analysis here will focus mainly on her last novel, *Between the Acts*, which she wrote between February 1938 and November 1940,[9] and the central role of a masculine lesbian playwright and producer who tries to reveal to an England exemplified by an ancient village in the heart of the nation, the exclusions of that nation, including and especially the artist herself—even as the country is under threat of annihilation by the coming of the Second World War.

The various Outsiders who populate Virginia Woolf's novels are marked not just because they cross borders of gender or sexual norms, but by their problematic place in contemporary English society. Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts*, can productively be read through a critical method that combines attention to sex and nation. The scope of the novel becomes apparent by focusing on a seemingly minor and multiply outcast character, Miss La Trobe. La Trobe's alien status is marked by her masculine lesbianism as well as her putative foreignness. According to other characters in the novel, she is neither "pure English" (57) nor "altogether a lady" (58). La Trobe's precarious relation to Englishness is further complicated by her role as creator of a pageant that brings the village population together and becomes the focal point of their day, and hence of the book. Her creation--a presentation of English

[9] It was published posthumously by Leonard Woolf in 1941.

literary history, medieval to modernist--ends in fragmentation, and La Trobe's failure to connect with her audience heightens her sense of solitude. However, she notes that after the pageant the countryside is "land merely, no land in particular" (210). That is, the significance of the pageant is that, like literature itself, it does the cultural work of transforming mere land into nation, and gives it significance, however fleeting and fragmentary and misunderstood. Ironically, however, this "nation" excludes its lesbian creator.

Woolf's preoccupations with nationalism, imperialism, the constraints of gender roles and subversive erotics are explored in most of her works. Perhaps in part because most of her novels were written within the memory of World War One, and, in the 1930s during the Spanish Civil War, the premonition and start of the Second World War, Virginia Woolf writes an anti-heroics, obliquely or directly invoking warriors and failed quester heroes—real and mythical—in order to critique the enterprise of hero-making in political as well as literary history.[10] Although Woolf limits the settings of her novels to England, the expanse of the British Empire is represented through her characters and the figure of the warrior hero enters her novels through her references and allusions. That Woolf breaks with conventions of how plots about women's lives have been written has been well established by three decades of feminist criticism; more recently, some scholars have re-evaluated Woolf

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[10] A very abbreviated list of examples would include references to the doomed soldiers of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" in *To the Lighthouse*, Siegfried in *The Years*, Antaeus in *Between the Acts*, and Woolf's own male characters: Andrew Ramsay (*To the Lighthouse*), Jacob Flanders (*Jacob's Room*), Septimus Smith (*Mrs. Dalloway*), and of course Percival (*The Waves*).

as a war novelist, a public intellectual, and as a critic of imperialism and capitalism.[11] This work will build on that criticism and will further explore how the questioning of patriarchal values and the so-called modernist crisis of masculinity is what allows Woolf to write queer erotic plots and characters, which of reject the heterosexual romance, and include portrayals of unmarried womanhood, lesbianism, bisexuality, and gender transformation.

In *Mrs. Dalloway,* for example, the failed warrior hero is tragically rendered in the shattered psyche of Septimus Smith, whom Woolf is at pains to connect to Clarissa Dalloway and her social circle. Smith's psychic repetitions of battlefield experiences invade the surreal normalcy of war-time London, drawing a critical connection between domestic, bourgeois security and the sacrifice of the national hero. Woolf connects the romance with the heroic plot by juxtaposing two characters with radically different lives and fates. Just as Smith's thoughts are consumed by thoughts of fallen fellow-warrior Evans, so, too, are Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts distracted, hers by the multiple erotic interests of her youth. If Smith has sacrificed his sanity in service of a heroic ideal, Clarissa Dalloway has sacrificed her queer erotic desires for a secure, if sterile, marriage. Having surrendered the passion of her youth, she now sleeps solitary, nun-like, in a narrow bed; instead of experiencing romance, she reads of Baron Marbot's retreat from Moscow.

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[11] For major critical works on Woolf, war and empire see, for example, Mark Hussey, ed., *Virginia Woolf and War*; Jane Marcus, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*; Karen Levenback, *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*; Anna Snaith, *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*.

Part I: Woolf and England: Trespassing on the Nation

Although Woolf's consummate Englishness certainly seeps into all of her work, as various scholars, such as Julia Briggs, Jane Marcus and Anna Snaith have noted, Woolf was no political nationalist. A pacifist, Woolf was horrified at the destructions wrought by the wars fought during her lifetime. Moreover, Woolf's pacifism is concomitant with her commitment to crossing borders of nations, class, and sex, which she often expressed through her ideas about words, literature and the English literary tradition.

In her introduction to Margaret Llewelyn Davies' *Life as We Have Known It* (1931), Woolf tells of her experience at a meeting of the congress of the Women's Cooperative Guild, which she attended in 1913.[12] Especially in the latter half of her epistolary introduction, Woolf describes her indirect experience of working class women's lives from the papers they wrote. She says the women's writings express "the mind [of working women] which lay spread over so wide a stretch of England" (230). Woolf acknowledges that although she is a "benevolent" attendee of the event, her class position means that as an audience member she is "irretrievably cut off from the actors," that is, the reality of the lives of these working class women. Since she is ultimately an "outcast from the flock" all she can do is "sit [t]here ..stamping [her feet] and clapping" (231). Nonetheless, she hopefully asserts that "these voices [which] are beginning only now to emerge from silence into half-articulate speech" will one day

[12] See Jane Marcus's *Art and Anger* (117-119) for a discussion of the original and revised versions of this introduction and Woolf's relation to working class women.

"break through and melt us together so that life will be richer and books more complex, and society will pool its possessions instead of segregating them" (239).

In the radio broadcast "Craftsmanship" (1937), Woolf describes words themselves as inherently democratic and promiscuous: "English words marry French words, German words, Indian words, Negro words, if they have a fancy" (205).[13] She asks if advances in education have improved literature over the centuries: "Do we write better, do we read better than we read and wrote four hundred years ago when we were unlectured, uncriticized, untaught? Is our Georgian literature a patch on the Elizabethan?" (204). Taking up an issue she returns to repeatedly in her essays, the current state of literature and whether there are any truly great writers among her contemporaries,[14] she suggests that the restrictions and hierarchies of modern society have a negative effect on words, which have "no ranks or titles in their society" and have a natural communal impulse to "hang together, in sentences, in paragraphs, sometimes for whole pages as a time" (206). Unlike the divisions on human intercourse, words do not make distinctions between "uneducated words" and "educated words," "uncultivated words" and "cultivated words" (205). Egalitarian, promiscuous and rather queer, Woolf playfully claims that it is the nature of words to be able to "change" and that they "hate anything that stamps them with one meaning or confines them" (206). Woolf concludes there is "no great poet" in her era because,

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[13] Of course Woolf's use of the phrases "Indian words" and "Negro words" are problematic. Woolf individualizes the European languages, yet seems to simply let "Indian" and "Negro" stand for the various languages spoken on the Indian subcontinent and all of Africa. The intentionally flirty but gratuitous "if they have a fancy" further exoticizes the Indian and Negro and gives them an erotic edge.

[14] See, for example "Modern Fiction" (1919) and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923/4).

her fellow writers refuse these "natural vagabonds" – words in their unbridled state – their "liberty" (207).

In "The Leaning Tower," a paper read to the Workers' Educational Association, Brighton, in 1940, Woolf writes:

> Literature is no one's private ground; literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves. It is thus that English literature will survive this war and cross the gulf--if commoners and outsiders like ourselves make that country our own country, if we teach ourselves how to read and write, how to preserve and how to create. (154)

What is suggested by "English literature" here is a transnational space that everyone can join to produce a borderless community. Literature is itself depicted as a country, but notably one in which "outsiders like ourselves" should trespass. Woolf's command to her listener – to trespass – recalls the walk on the grass Mary (take your pick, Beton, Seton or Carmichael) takes at the beginning of *A Room of One's Own*. Reprimanded by the Beadle for trespassing where only male Fellows and Scholars are permitted, the remainder of Woolf's lecture asserts the need for women to transgress boundaries and create for themselves physical and intellectual spaces.

In her 1930's anti-war manifesto *Three Guineas*, Woolf poses the question, "How much of 'England' in fact belongs to" the "daughter of an educated man?" Her response is the oft-quoted passage: "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (109). A socialist as well as a pacifist, Woolf's "whole world" is a transnational space that transgresses the

exclusionary borders of the institution of the patriarchal nation state.[15] In her essay, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940), Woolf analyses the types of education and traditions which underlie patriotism and the ideal of military honor. Woolf cites a patriotic passage expressed by a soldier from the First World War: "To fight against a real enemy, to earn undying honour and glory by shooting total strangers, and to come home with my breast covered with medals and decorations, that was the summit of my hope. . . . It was for this that my whole life so far had been dedicated, my education, training, everything" (246, ellipses in original). When she hears the sound of an air raid which "compel[s] one to think about peace" (243), she hopes for something that can substitute for these patriotic, military slogans: "We must help the young English to root out from themselves the love of medals and decorations. . . . We must compensate the man for the loss of his gun" (247).

For young English men, 'international space' consists of a world divided into nation-states and is the territory in which they can seek their honor, but Woolf explains that an international space filled with the sounds of air raids--the sign of the soldiers' pursuit of honor--should be supplanted by a new concept of transnational space that abolishes patriarchy and patriotic ideals of honor that demand the self-sacrifice of scores of young men from various European nations. As Jane Marcus in her introduction to the newly annotated American edition of *Three Guineas* reveals, for Woolf to be anti-nationalist and anti-war and to expose the horror of war meant not simply to be anti-fascist and take sides. Instead, it means to understand that the divisions between nations begin not just in the homeland, but in the home. To quote

[15] In *Art and Anger*, Jane Marcus notes that Woolf's pacifism and socialism were in fact rooted in international socialism (103-106).

another oft-cited passage from *Three* Guineas: "[T]he public and the private worlds are inseparably connected; … the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other" (142). In reading Woolf's anti-war novels, we have to read the marital along with the martial.

The Anti-War Erotics of *Mrs. Dalloway*

In *Mrs. Dalloway* Septimus Smith, the shell-shocked World War I veteran, is the most obvious character through whom Woolf is able to "criticize the social system, and to show it at work at its most intense" (*Diary* 19 June 1923). An outsider because of his class as well as the subtle suggestions of homosexuality, Septimus was one of the first to volunteer for the war because he fell prey to nationalist propaganda and wanted to "save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and [his teacher] Miss Isabel Pole" (84). Post war, he no longer believes in the "England" he has fought for. He has come 'home' to a London that emphatically wants to insist that the "war [is] over; thank Heaven--over" (4-5). For Septimus, however, the war isn't over; the battle still rages in his mind, as he is haunted by memories of witnessing the man he loved die before his eyes. Septimus tried to achieve selfhood by adopting a love of his nation; instead, it was the nation's desires he fulfilled, and in spite of the promise of a place in society, he became a man without a coherent self, without a home that recognized him, and that continued—through the doctors who were supposedly helping him—to make demands of him.

Woolf queers Septimus's character in several ways. As a result of his training and his experience of the trenches, he "developed manliness" and was

promoted (84). But instead of thinking of himself as a war hero, Septimus is dehumanized by his experiences. He falters in communication with fellow humans, but hears birds speaking Greek.[16] The homosocial bonding of war led him to experience a playfully erotic attraction to his commander, Evans. After the loss of Evans, he marries Rezia in a moment of panic. Septimus suffers not homosexual panic, but he is traumatized. He believes he is condemned because he cannot feel, and the moment of the deadening of his own sense of fellow feeling comes when he witnesses Evans' death. He marries Rezia because "the panic was on him—he could not feel" (85). His choice of an Italian spouse is typical of wartime romance plots in which men fall in love with the women caretaker on or near the battlefield in which they are stationed (as in *A Farewell to Arms*); nonetheless, it's notable that he doesn't choose another Miss Isabel Pole, the woman who helped teach him how to be English and read Shakespeare and for whom he idealistically fought. Moreover, though he has married, he refuses to participate in the regeneration of England; he refuses to give Rezia a baby. The one moment of bliss he experiences with her in the novel is when he helps her decorate a hat. He has tried the role of a 'man,' as required of him, and now he rejects it. Even the suicide ending is quasi-feminized. Not the death of the hero in battle, Septimus jumps to his death to avoid being further subjugated by the state, put away for his own good now that the doctors have claimed him to be a danger to himself. Such a choice is more typically the plot given to women, such as

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[7] As has been amply discussed by others, this episode reflects Woolf's own experience during her mental breakdowns. However, I believe this episode also has symbolic significance, indicating how dehumanized the war survivor has become. It also adds to Woolf's depiction of Septimus as an Outsider to the nation; the affinity of queer outsiders with the animal world is also developed in the fiction of Djuna Barnes.

Antoinette in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, who avoid patriarchal authority by taking the only thing they have. As Septimus says before he takes the plunge:[17] "I'll give it [my life] to you" (146). Though his part of the plot ends three-quarters of the way into the book, the news of Septimus's suicide nevertheless trespasses on Clarissa's party.

[17] The novel opens with Clarissa taking a "plunge" into the day—and into her past.

Part II: "Miss" La Trobe: The Lesbian as the Hero of Modernism

The years between Woolf's first conception of *Pointz Hall* (later titled *Between the Acts*) in early 1938 and when she completed the final draft in February 1941 marked a period in the history of England when the threat of foreign invasion and conquest was relentless. As Woolf scholars such as Julia Briggs and Hermione Lee discuss in some detail, Woolf's diaries for those years show that she was often preoccupied with the disturbing historical events taking place: the Munich Crisis, the declaration of war, the fall of Paris, the preparation for a German invasion, the Battle of Britain, the Blitz.

In May 1938, around the time she began writing *Pointz Hall*, Woolf wrote in her diary, "The whole of Europe may be in flames – it's on the cards"; by August of that year she fears that war with Hitler will mean "the complete ruin . . . of civilization" (162). During the Blitz she wrote of London: "Odd how often I think with what is love I suppose of the City: of the walk to the Tower: that is my England; I mean, if a bomb destroyed one of those little alleys with the brass bound curtains & the river smell & the old woman reading I should feel - well, what the patriots feel" (Diary V 263).

Although direct reference to political or historical events is not unusual in her works of fiction, in *Between the Acts* Woolf seems at greater pains to connect the domestic scene of the novel to the political crisis unfolding in what Alex Zwerdling calls the "real world." As Deiman asserts, there is an "almost obsessive preoccupation with history on virtually every page" (56). Scholars who argue that because Woolf genuinely feared the destruction of the land that she loved *Between*

the Acts expresses a "reawakened love for her native land" (Zwerdling 311-12) or is nostalgic for a unified, idyllic England miss the many elements that undermine such sentiments in the novel. This isn't to say that Woolf wasn't horrified by the thought of England and especially London being invaded. Numerous entries in her diaries do express a love of much about England. However, her fondness for many things English—especially its literature—is apparent throughout her life and, more importantly, such fondness is not the same as patriotic nationalism. Unlike many of her liberal, even left, contemporaries, in spite of the Spanish Civil War and World War II, Woolf remained a committed pacifist.

The novel itself takes place in a village in the heart of England on a day in June 1939. It begins with a conversation about the village's need for a new cesspool and ends with a domestic argument between the central heterosexual couple in the novel, which will likely resolve into sex, and possibly procreation. The remainder of this section will consider the connections Woolf revealed in her last novel between the domestic scene and the battles both at home and threatening from abroad; why Woolf writes a novel whose dramatic center is the artist and the audience at a time of war; and how those elements are themselves connected through the lesbian hero of the book, La Trobe.[18]

Until very recently critics have tended to read La Trobe's lesbianism as coincidental if they mentioned it at all, as the particularity that marks her as an

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[18] Like most of the queer scholarship on *Between the Acts* (but unlike most of the scholarship that does not foreground La Trobe's lesbianism) I discard the appellation "Miss" since it's unsuited to her. In the text I read its use as an ironic marker, further calling attention to La Trobe's utter lack of femininity and to her outcast singularity.

outsider, but as only one of the many outsiders Woolf is interested in. What I want to consider is how La Trobe's lesbianism is not merely that which marks her as an outsider, but how, or why, her particular outsiderness coincides with her role as creator of the village pageant, making her in Woolf's final novel, the mythic hero of an anti-war text.

Given the crucial role that La Trobe plays in the novel, and that the character of the woman artist would seem to be a natural focus for Woolf scholars, it's curious that recent criticism, including that which is attentive to Woolf's politics, pays little attention to La Trobe, and if she is mentioned, don't consider the significance of her being a masculine lesbian. In her 2005 book on Woolf, Julia Briggs makes the astute point that, "Like Woolf in *Three Guineas*, Miss La Trobe endeavors to make her audience confront themselves by holding in front of them a wilderness of mirrors and reflective surfaces" (386). But her only comment on La Trobe's lesbianism is to suggest that "her masculine appearance and bossy manner suggest the composer Ethel Smyth, an archetype of an artist very different from Woolf herself" (385).[19]

In Briggs's essay on "Virginia Woolf's 1930s Novels and History" in the recently published *Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (2000), there is no mention of La Trobe in her discussion of *Between the Acts*. Although British scholarship has until very recently lagged behind American criticism in re-considering Woolf's place in modernism, in the canon of female writers, and as an intellectual, it's still distressing to see this otherwise excellent collection of essays, and its "new feminist approaches" to topics such as "Woolf's feminism" (a topic that

[18] Elsewhere Jane Marcus suggests Edith Craig as a possible model for the character.

will likely never be exhausted in Woolf studies, by Laura Marcus), her "socio-political vision" (by the ever-illuminating David Bradshaw), not fully address the role of female homoerotics (or even sexuality more broadly) in Woolf's novels. Not only is there no essay on sexuality per se in this collection, but the words 'lesbian,' 'invert,' 'homosexual,' 'Sapphist' don't even appear in the index ('prostitute,' however, does). The one essay that addresses "female sexuality" (a phrase that is in the index) does so under the sub-heading "homoerotic desire and the ambivalence of the mother" (Jouve 266). In this essay, when Jouve lists the lesbian and homosexual characters in Woolf, she names Clarissa Dalloway and Lily Briscoe—and returns to 1970s feminist considerations of the attaction/relation between Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay. She also focuses on the sex-change narrative of *Orlando*, which "undoes the Freudian models of masculinity and feminity" (268). Jouve's analysis of Woolf's queer erotics is limited to an application of sexology rather than developing a politically grounded reading of sex and gender roles. I argue that La Trobe is *the* queer character to focus on when discussing subversive erotics and cultural disruptions—especially the anti-imperialist and anti-war assertions—in Woolf's novels.

Unlike other Woolf novels, in which lesbianism is submerged in a fantastical gender parody (*Orlando*), has been revised out of the text overtly (as is the case with Rhoda in *The Waves*), [20] or coincides with heterosexual marriage (as in *Mrs. Dalloway*), it takes no sophisticated reading to perceive La Trobe's sexuality. In spite of its directness, however, I would argue that the lesbian representation in *Between*

[20] For readings of Rhoda as more explicitly depicted as a lesbian in early drafts of *The Waves*, see Oxindine and Hackett.

the Acts deserves to be accounted for in the text, rather than taken for granted, or read simply as another aspect of alienation and disunity in the novel. Specifically, I want to consider how lesbianism positions La Trobe as an outsider to culture, especially considering that her role in the novel is to tell the story of English culture, a selectively abbreviated version of the history of the nation, to an audience threatened with the destruction of their nation.

The novel begins and ends with a domestic scene. It is, however, a perpetually quarrelsome domesticity that resides at Pointz Hall. The discussion of the cesspool which opens the novel is, to Mrs. Haines, an unwelcome intrusion into the presumably genteel world of the novel and sets the stage for various intrusions and disruptions that will disturb the tranquil, and antiseptic, domesticity Mrs. Haines desires.[21] As a symbol of waste and impurity, the cesspool also signifies that which domesticity wishes, perhaps needs, to keep hidden.

La Trobe comes late to the text, about one quarter of the way in, after the domestic setting and the ongoing conflicts between the heterosexual couple Isa and Giles Oliver and siblings Lucy Swithin and Bart Oliver have been established. The tension-filled luncheon "shared" by Isa, Giles, Bart, Lucy, Mrs. Manresa and William Dodge is interrupted by the laughter of the actors getting ready for the pageant. From there we get a glimpse of La Trobe in action. We are informed that the previous winter, when she was first shown the land on which the pageant was to be performed,

> Very little was actually know about her; outwardly she was swarthy,

[21] In spite of Mrs. Haines's sense of herself—she likes to tell people that her family has lived in the village for many centuries—she, too, described as a "goose-faced woman with eyes protruding as if they saw something to gobble in the gutter," is associated with filth (3).

> sturdy and thick set; strode about the fields in a smock frock; sometimes with a cigarette in her mouth; often with a whip in her hand; and used rather strong language—perhaps, then she wasn't altogether a lady? At any rate, she had a passion for getting things up. (58)

Her masculinity is further emphasized in the description of her "abrupt manner and stocky figure; her thick ankles and sturdy shoes; her rapid decisions barked out in guttural accents" (63).

Notably, La Trobe is marked as a misfit not just by her comfortable shoes and masculine style, but also by her foreignness—her nationality isn't apparent, but she is perceived to be not quite English. Characters try to guess her place of origin from the shape of her face or from the sound of her name; Mrs. Bingham speculates that she may be Russian; others think she may be from the Channel Islands. Their preoccupation with her place of origin and their suggestions that she must not be English imply that the provincial villagers assume that the threat to their cultural purity comes from outside their community. In spite of the audience's preoccupations, the threats to their community and unity, however, don't come solely from the outside, from the war planes that interrupt the pageant, from the threat of German invasion mentioned in the news reports Giles is unable to keep at bay. As Alex Zwerdling notes, the village community itself, although rooted in English soil, is riven with division.

The choice of La Trobe as the storyteller is significant not just because as an artist she can see whole, even if what she sees is a fragmented, modernist world. And not just because as a woman, she has no country and is in a position to critique the

political structure of the nation even as it is articulated in the text of her pageant. And not just because as a Sapphist, she is outside the "traffic in women," to borrow Gayle Rubin's phrase. La Trobe is an invert, a decidedly masculine lesbian, and thus one who, according to the sexologists' construction of sexual and social deviancy at the time, appropriates male appearance, dress and behavior. A symbol of taint and impurity, the invert is both more clearly visible and a greater threat to the patriarchal social structure than less overtly masculine (and thus less threatening) categories of female homoeroticism.[22]

From this outsider position, La Trobe is able to read the dis-unity behind nationalist narratives, including the literary tradition, and is able to reveal through her own literary production that the nation is internally fragmented, and in particular that it is riven around erotics. Moreover, besides the lesbian being a category of identity that is sometimes more about appropriation of male roles or power – or a performative display of such things, in addition to (or sometimes in place of) erotic desire – constructions of sexuality are also intertwined with other discourses of nation, and in particular white middle-class racial supremacy. More than less threatening types of lesbians, the invert is constructed by a nationalist discourse that is

[22] Two essays from *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (Chauncey, Duberman, Vicinus, eds.) are useful for understanding the sexological construction of types of lesbians in the modernist period, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's "Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman 1870-1936''and Esther Newton's "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman." Lucy Bland and Laura Doan's *Sexology Uncensored* is a useful collection of primary documents of "sexual science."

simultaneously racialized and sexualized[23] -- that La Trobe is remarked to be both foreign (or at least "not English") and not a lady is an example of the overlap. This type of nationalist discourse becomes most apparent, not surprisingly, in the Victorian section of the pageant, as Budge articulates a discourse of purity and prosperity in the interests of Empire.

Notably, "invert" is not the term Virginia Woolf usually used when referring to lesbians; even in regards to the masculine Vita Sackville-West she uses the term Sapphist, sometimes lesbian. Except for Miss Kilman, Elizabeth Dalloway's teacher, none of Woolf's other literary lesbians are depicted as inverts. But in her final novel, one that deals thematically not just with past war (as in *Mrs. Dalloway*) but pending war, and written during the Battle of Britain and after *Three Guineas,* her exegesis on patriarchy and the cause and prevention of war, Woolf gives us her most dangerous and most visible lesbian.

Though much recently has been done to recuperate Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) as the first modern lesbian hero;[24] and while Woolf's *Orlando* (also 1928) is an important novel to read alongside Hall's for providing an alternate presentation of a lesbian narrative and a narrative of gender subversion, I argue that, in La Trobe, Woolf created a modern lesbian hero, the solitary, despised creator, a Tiresias/Cassandra who sees all and labors to reveal her insights to an uncomprehending audience.

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[23] For more on this, see, for example, Siobhan Somerville's *Queering the Color Line*, as well as Sander Gilman's *Difference and Pathology* and Robin Hackett's *Sapphic Primitivism*.

[24] See Judith Halberstam's chapter on Hall in *Female Masculinity* and the collection edited by Laura Doan and Jay Prosser, *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on the* Well of Loneliness.

This point, and Virginia Woolf's choice to depict this type of lesbian and place her at the center of this text, is significant because the invert is often constructed along with other degenerate identities–especially those of race and class.[25] La Trobe is not a lady because she's decidedly not feminine, but this also suggests she is of a lower, or at least indeterminate, class. La Trobe's choice of the word "slave" (211) to describe her relation to her audience is also telling. While setting up the Victorian section, La Trobe is described as "work[ing] like a nigger," (150) the only time that epithet is used in the novel.

The pageant's modern sections illustrate how place and nation and erotics are intertwined. The Victorian section of the pageant, that which of course immediately precedes the disunity of the early twentieth century, presents a romance plot but it is especially notable for its articulation of the policing of Empire—and what is involved in the policing of Empire. The main actor in this section is the village publican Budge, made up as a constable and wielding a truncheon, a sharp contrast to the inaudible little girl who personified England in the opening section of the pageant. The words spoken by Budge indicate that the policing done from the heart of London in Queen Victoria's England focused on maintaining control over the subjects of empire:

> At Piccadilly Circus; at 'Yde Park Corner, directing the traffic of 'Er Majesty's Empire. The Shah of Persia; Sultan of Morocco; or it may be 'Er Majesty in person; or Cook's tourists; black men; white men; sailors, soldiers; crossing the ocean; to proclaim her Empire; all of 'em

[25] For more on these overlapping constructions see Robin Hackett, *Sapphic Primitivism: Productions of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Key Works of Modern Fiction*, which itself builds on prior work by Sander Gilman, Lucy Bland and others.

Obey the Rule of my truncheon. (161-162)

Besides extending beyond the borders of England, the concerns of empire also extend into the domestic sphere: "The ruler of an Empire must keep his eye on the cot; spy too in the kitchen; drawing-room; library; wherever one or two, me and you, come together. Purity our watchword; prosperity and respectability" (162-163). Note what's being surveilled—erotics (the cot), knowledge (the library), and for what purpose—purity and prosperity. Purity, a word which implies the definition and policing of the borders of race, sex, and class. The punishment for those who are presumably impure: "[L]et 'em fester in . . . Cripplegate; St. Giles's; Whitechapel; the Minories. Let 'em sweat at the mines; cough at the looms; rightly endure their lot" (163). Thus the impure, the Outsider, is to be subjected to hard, unsafe labor, incarcerated, institutionalized. But, as Budge openly declares: "That's the price of Empire; that's the white man's burden" (163). Although Budge evokes Kipling's "white man's burden," he also shows that the subjects of control are domestic outsiders as well; the ideology of empire demarcates the boundaries between the insiders and outsiders both in the homeland and the colonies. The rule of empire is not just political rule, but it reaches into the most private spaces and behavior as well; it extends "Over thought and religion; drink; dress; manners; marriage too" (162).

The connection between domesticity and the cultural work of Empire is also exemplified by the evangelical lovers presented in this section, Eleanor and Edgar. Not satisfied merely to enjoy desire for each other, they look forward to a life of converting heathens into a semblance of their own subjectivities. What they desire most is to "convert the heathens" while they spend "a lifetime [together] in the

African desert" (166). The romance plot also extends to the final character named in this section, Mr. Sibthorp, a bachelor. The chorus sings:

> O has Mr. Sibthorp a wife? O has Mr. Sibthorp a wife? That is the hornet, the bee in the bonnet … that whirling and twirling are forever unfurling the folds of the motherly heart; for a mother must ask, if daughters she has, begot in the billowy fourposter family bed, O did he unpack, with his prayerbook and bands; his gown and his cane; his rod and his line; the family album and gun…. Has Mr. Sibthorp a wife? O has Mr. Sibthorp a wife? (169)

Pointing to Pointz Hall at the end of his scene, Budge as the policeman proclaims in the name of Victoria's Empire the country house that has been host to this pageant, respectable, prosperous and pure: "'Ome, Sweet 'Ome," and the gramophone and audience joins in singing in praise of Home Sweet Home:

> *It's time, gentleman, time ladies, time to pack up and be gone. From where I stand, truncheon in hand, guarding respectability, and prosperity, and the purity of Victoria's land, I see before me*--(he pointed: there was Pointz Hall; the rooks cawing; the smoke rising)—
>
> *'Ome, Sweet 'Ome*.
>
> The gramophone took up the strain: *Through pleasures and palaces, etc. There's no place like Home.*
>
> *Home, gentlemen; home, ladies, it's time to pack up and go home.* (172, italics in original)

The original title of the novel, *Pointz Hall*, made the domestic setting more central to the text—asserting the domestic sphere as the place imperialist ideologies are played out. *Between the Acts* is a more queer title, indicative of uncertainty, interstices, performance and perception. The novel is thematically concerned with people and place: with families who trace their origins to the Domesday book, with Miss Swithin's preoccupations with geographic history and ancient tectonic shifts, and with the newspaper's portent of pending destruction as the charcaters wonder what would happen should the channel that separates England from the dangers "out there" be bridged.

In contrast to the certainty and security the villagers attach to the site, La Trobe throughout the novel literally never seems to have a place to be. The audience takes their seats and mingles between the scenes; the actors have their stage or their makeshift dressing room; La Trobe, however, perpetually hides herself behind a tree. It is there she digs in her heels and wishes away her audience. Nonetheless, as the author of the pageant, La Trobe enacts Woolf's injunction to the Worker's Educational Association that "literature is no one's private ground." Moreover, La Trobe "trespass[es] freely and fearlessly." La Trobe may "hide in the bushes," but she also hangs her props from the trees, tramples the grass, and alters the landscape. By setting the pageant at the site of the manor house, La Trobe's trespass enacts a queer disruption of domestic space. While the pageant is underway, the land and the townsfolk are under her control. As such, she is Woolf's hero; La Trobe does what Woolf exhorts her working class audience to do, and as a result, "It is thus that English literature will survive this war and cross the gulf" ("Leaning Tower" 154).

In her posthumously published fragment, "Anon," which Woolf worked on as she was writing her final novel, she describes the earliest phase of English culture as one in which writers did not impose their individual personalities on their work but wrote anonymously. She argues: "It gave the early writing an impersonality, a generality. It gave us the ballads; it gave us the songs. It allowed us to know nothing of the writer. . . . He can say what everyone feels" (397). Numerous readers of *Between the Acts* have suggested that some of the issues Woolf raises in "Anon" regarding the role of the writer are applicable to a reading of *Between the Acts*. In particular, Brenda Silver in her analysis of "Anon" claims that "Woolf contrasts the communal aspects of early literature with the isolation of the individual writer who emerged in the Renaissance, and who was struggling in 1940 and 1941 to remain creative" (360).

Nora Eisenberg goes as far so to refer to La Trobe as Anon, and there's certainly textual evidence to support that reading, especially at the end of the pageant when the "voice . . . no one knew" (187) emerges from the bushes to exhort the audience to shed their illusions. Likewise, when the Reverend Streatfield tries to locate La Trobe, who remains "invisible," he concludes she "wishes it seems to remain anonymous" (194). [4] Although "for one moment [La Trobe] held them together - the dispersing company" (98), her creation ends in fragmentation, and her failure to connect with her audience heightens her sense of solitude. Her feelings about her public, moreover, are notably resentful: "'I am the slave of my audience'" (211); "O to write a play without an audience - *the* play" (180).

[4] Annette Oxindine comments, astutely I think, that the Reverend cannot locate her because he misidentifies this invert twice as "a lady" (122).

La Trobe's wish—to write a play without an audience—is in contrast to the allegedly unifying impulse of the pageant itself. In contrast to Anon who is so at one with the audience that her individual identity is unimportant, La Trobe's desire to omit the audience entirely from the work of art is a telling one. Her outcast status prevents her from being part of the 'we' to whom the work is presumably addressed. If the teller is excluded, then the hope that art will unify is shattered. Instead of articulating common values, and communal identity, the artist and the pageant—which ends with the audience literally holding up mirrors—hold up a critical image to an audience invited to see itself as fragmented and disordered. As a lesbian outsider creator, La Trobe will not produce a pageant that does the cultural work of empire.

In spite of her outsider status, the failure of the pageant to unite, and her perpetual isolation, La Trobe notes that after the pageant the countryside is "land merely, no land in particular" (210). That is, the cultural significance of the pageant is that it can transform mere land into nation, just at the house which "had been obliterated" by the pageant emerges after the audience leaves and the players pack up and go home. Even before the June pageant is over, La Trobe begins to imagine the beginning of a new creation, words which elude her at first. However, before she can create again she must take her "voyage away from the shore" and depart the domestic scene.[26] As she leaves she is further reminded of her outcast status as she encounters one of the villagers, Mrs. Chalmers, who insults her. La Trobe thinks, "The women in

[26] As she does in her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), Woolf invokes the concept of the sea voyage—typically a plot of mythic masculine self-discovery. As used here it further heightens La Trobe's distance from the rest of the village, adds to her masculine characterization, and further contrasts her to the domesticated Isa.

the cottages with the red geraniums always did that. She was an outcast. Nature had somehow set her apart from her kind" (211).

After the villagers return to their homes, and Isa and Giles return to their eternal domestic quarrel, the solitary La Trobe thinks about her next creation:

> [LaTrobe] took her chair and looked through the smoke at a crude glass painting of a cow in a stable; also at a cock and a hen. She raised her glass to her lips. And drank. And listened. Words of one syllable sank into the mud. She drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning--wonderful words.
>
> The cheap clock ticked; smoke obscured the pictures. Smoke became tart on the roof of her mouth. Smoke obscured the earth-coloured jackets. She no longer saw them, yet they upheld her, sitting arms akimbo with her glass before her. There was the high ground at midnight; there the rock; and two scarcely perceptible figures.
>
> Suddenly the tree was pelted with starlings. She set down her glass. She heard the first words. (211-12)

The association between La Trobe and "the mud" here resonates in a couple of ways. There are numerous references in the novel to the prehistoric, primeval world. La Trobe is thus the creator, who will bring life out of the mud. Or perhaps the symbol of the newly emergent writers who will trespass and make their words common ground and thus—in spite of the underlying barbarity of civilization and the specific potentially catastrophic destruction to come—ensure the continuation of English

literature, just as she, in spite of her feelings of defeat and insult, at novel's end is still writing.

La Trobe also, I would argue, is associated with Anteaus. The myth of Anteaus is referred to earlier in the novel and is used to help exemplify the contrast between the rational Bart Oliver and his sister, Lucy Swithin. When she asks where the origin of the habit of touching wood for good luck comes, "Touch wood; touch earth; Anteaus" says Bart, scoffing at the superstition (25). Jane Marcus reads the story of Anteaus as a patriarchal myth, as Antaeus has to be connected to earth, his mother, Gaia, in order to have strength. Antaeus is a warrior who makes a monument of the skulls of those he has defeated and dedicates it to his father, Neptune. Thus it is a myth that illustrates the family's role in war; it illustrates the sacrifice made in the name of the father but with the necessary support of the mother.[27] Alex Zwerdling, in contrast, interprets the inclusion of the reference to this myth in the novel as being about the role of the artist; he claims the reference is "based on the assumption that an artist gains strength as Antaeus did by touching the earth" (24). The interpretation I would suggest is that, through La Trobe, Woolf re-writes the patriarchal myth. The female artist connects to the mother (earth); in La Trobe's imagination, "Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. … The mud became fertile."

With La Trobe's voyage away from the domestic world to the Inn her new "audience," the villagers there gathered, continue to hold her in view and judge her as she sits in her masculine pose. While they become obscured in smoke, she is able

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[27] *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (92-93).

again to create. This scene is juxtaposed to the regrouping of the family and Isa's thoughts about the pageant:

> Down in the hollow, at Pointz Hall, beneath the trees, the table was cleared in the dining room . . . .The play was over, the strangers gone, and they were alone--the family.
>
> Still the play hung in the sky of the mind--moving, diminishing, but still there. (212)

. . . .

> Did you feel,' [Lucy] asked, 'what [the Reverend] said: we act different parts but are the same?'
>
> 'Yes,' Isa answered. 'No,' she added. It was Yes, no. Yes, yes, yes, the tide rushed out embracing. No, no, no, it contracted. The old boot appeared on the shingle.
>
> 'Orts, scraps, and fragments,' she quoted what she remembered of the vanishing play. (215)

Although the "meaning" of the pageant leaves Isa puzzled, upon seeing her husband the experience of the day has left her thinking:

> 'The father of my children, whom I love and hate.' Love and hate— how they tore her asunder! Surely it was time someone invented a new plot, or that the author came out from the bushes...(ellipses in text 215)

. . .

> The usual sounds reverberated through the shell. . . . Sitting in the shell of the room she watched the pageant fade. The flowers flashed before they faded. She watched them flash.
>
> The paper crackled. The second hand jerked on. M. Daladier had pegged down the franc. The girl had gone skylarking with the troopers. She had screamed. She had hit him. . . . What then?
>
> When Isa looked at the flowers again the flowers had faded. (ellipses in text 216)

The flowers (which has "flashed" as she recalled the pageant) now fade, as the violent world intrudes. She recalls a news report from that day's paper, an item she has reflected on earlier in the day (20), about a girl misled by troopers at Whitehall who coaxed her into a barn to see a horse with a "green tail." Wishing for a fantasy, the girl instead was gang raped.

Though Isa has a shadowy – and fading-- appreciation for La Trobe's work (in contrast to the men in the family, Bart and Giles, who dismiss it outright), because she herself lacks the courage to "trespass" she is doomed to continue her domestic role. Isa herself is an "artist"—or wants to be. Her poetry is lame and, in contrast to the disruptive La Trobe who displays her ideas for all to see (though she keeps herself hidden), Isa writes her vacuous poetry in the pages of an account book. Her sexuality is confined in a marriage she is uncertain about; she is cut off from her own children. When she views them through the window glass the word that comes to mind to describe her is "abortive" (15). While she has an intense erotic response to Rupert Haines, and thus seems capable of passion, and she is wholly sympathetic to and

sensitively perceptive about the homosexual William Dodge, she doesn't have the courage to get down in the mud as does La Trobe. Likewise, Lucy is depicted as willing to let herself be confined by her brother: "'I was going to get a biscuit to thank the actors ... My brother says one musn't thank the author, Miss La Trobe.' It was always 'my brother ... my brother' who rose from the depths of her lily pool" (206). Kindly but somewhat ridiculous, Lucy, too, ignores "the battle in the mud."

The novel ends with the lesbian creator, in spite of the coming war, continuing to write. She forgoes her home and bed, not wanting to be reminded that her actress lover has left her. What she begins to write – the vision that emerges from the mud depicts, not coincidentally, given the connections Woolf repeatedly makes between the patriarchal family and nationalist conflict, the domestic scene. The new curtain rises to reveal Isa and Giles, for the first time that day, about to have a conversation. We are told they will fight. That they will also reproduce is bawdily suggested by the first physical gesture Giles toward Isa that day, he "Offer[s] his wife a banana" (213). She initially refuses it. The final scene as described, as numerous critics have noted (Beer and Zwerdling, to name just two), harkens back to the beginning of time. Isa had hoped that "someone [would] invent a new plot" or that "the author [would come] out from the bushes" (215). Instead, she resumes her domestic role as the memory of the pageant fades away.

Chapter 2 -- Djuna Barnes's Imperial and Erotic Geographies

Part I: The Bed and the Battlefield

The setting of American expatriate Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood*, first published in 1936, is primarily Europe between the world wars. Barnes's thematic concerns with place and exile illustrate the migrations and displacement that marked cities such as Paris and Berlin in the twenties and thirties. For a number of critics, Barnes's use of post-war European settings emphasizes the erotic displacement of her main characters, focusing especially on what Jane Marcus calls "the night world of lesbian, homosexual and transvestite Paris" (223) that was host to expatriate Americans as well as Europeans displaced by the First World War. Barnes was clearly developing these ideas in the short fiction she wrote more than a decade before *Nightwood* was published and she continued to develop her themes into the 1960s, well after she had returned to the U.S.

Barnes was so much a part of the literary culture of Bohemian New York and especially expatriate Europe of the teens, twenties and thirties, that her name inevitably comes up in memoirs of contemporaries or any popular or critical survey of the period. As Peter Mailloux notes, "Barnes [is] an ideal subject for a biography. First of all, she lived a fascinating life. She did important things, she knew important people, she lived in exotic places" (141). The record of her place in early twentieth century expatriate literary circles is documented by references to her in autobiographical works by Robert McAlmon, Peggy Guggenheim, Margaret Anderson, Paul Bowles, Janet Flanner, Natalie Barney, Sylvia Beach, and Mabel Dodge Luhan. All of these provide important source material for recording Barnes's

life, the impression she made on others, and her reputation as a writer. Nonetheless, Barnes's own reclusive nature and her faltering output in the last decades of her life did little to bolster her earlier reputation. It seems as though Natalie Barney's observation of Barnes in the twenties only became more true as Barnes got older: "I never introduced an author more gauche and more incapable of helping her own cause" (166).

Barnes's own work reveals much about her life, beyond what we find in letters and autobiographies written by others, Djuna Barnes's work itself has been used as source material. According to Shari Benstock, "Reading literature as biography is a common feature of critical analyses of expatriate writing. Memoirists of the period emphasize the *roman à clef* aspects of these literary works, identifying the circumstances and characters of the Paris setting" (467). Many scholars have focused on puzzling out the intersections of her life and works. There has been considerable interest, for example, in finding the real life correspondents for characters in *Nightwood* as well as for her satire on Natalie Barney's lesbian salon, the *Ladies Almanack* (see Jay, Kannenstine).

Phillip Herring's biography, published in 1995, as with most of the work on Barnes, considers the life and work as inextricable, hence the title, *Djuna: The Life and Work of Djuna Barnes*. Herring's is thus primarily a critical biography, or at least it is meant to be. It is very useful for providing a narrative frame Barnes's life and publications and thus places her in social and historical context, although with questionable emphasis on certain aspects of her life or on the lives of her contemporaries. Overall, Herring has more to say about the life than the work, and the

effect does little to bolster her literary status or provide a better way of reading her enigmatic writings. Herring doesn't seem to be up to the challenges his subject demands. Although it is a valuable source of information about Barnes, it nevertheless suffers its own limitations. Herring too often seems willing to take Barnes's statements at face value when it is convenient for him to do so, while other times admitting her penchant for dissembling. He seems uncomfortable with her sexuality and the sexual aspects of some of her lesbian writing. He concludes, for example, about one early publication that, "If one truly cared for Djuna Barnes, one would say very little indeed about [it]" (88) and in particular is offended by the "hideous images" in the poem and claims that Barnes portrays "lesbian life in the most horribly negative terms imaginable" (88) as he then quotes from a poem that describes cunnilingus. Although he makes use of feminist scholarship when convenient to him, he too easily dismisses feminist perspectives without seriously considering them. He seems to want to recuperate Barnes as a heterosexual who lapses into bisexuality, and towards that end pays inordinate attention to some of her brief affairs with men.

In startling ways, Herring seems not to take his subject seriously. For example, Barnes for many years received financial assistance from her friend Peggy Guggenheim. Herring so frequently uses the phrase "her unofficial Guggenheim" to describe the financial support, that it begins to sound pejorative. In the meantime, however, he never considers the subject of the official Guggenheim for which Barnes

applied in 1930.[28] He seems too willing to draw the simplistic conclusion that because Barnes was not formally educated that she did not have a mind to think seriously about the tumultuous historic events that occurred while she was writing her major works.

As the *New York Times* reviewer noted, Herring's book is "less gossipy and more reliable than its predecessor, but the reader is still left with an awful lot of questions" (Seymour 12). Some of those questions may be endemic to any study of Barnes, but it demands that her biographer be sensitive to the contradictions within the archival record, to Barnes's own inclination towards secrecy, irony, and at times outright deception when seeming to reveal facts about her own life, her estimation of others, or her position on any number of issues.

Barnes resided in Paris for roughly twelve years, from the early twenties to the mid-thirties. While living in Greenwich Village in the years prior, she had been a prolific writer and journalist. She wrote three one-act plays that were staged by the Provincetown Playhouse, and she acted in a few of Eugene O'Neill's plays. She published a small volume of illustrated verse, *A Book of Repulsive Women*. Thus her reputation as a writer preceded her arrival on the continent. In Paris of the twenties, Barnes published regularly in the leading small presses, including the *Little Review*, the *transatlantic review* and the *Dial*. Her novel *Ryder* was a bestseller in the United

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[28] She in fact applied for Guggenheim Fellowships twice in her life. Once, in 1930 outlining two projects, one of which was to "research the relationship of the Jew and the court for a book in progress whose chief figure is an Austrian Jew." This proposal had the support of T.S. Eliot; Ernest Hemingway, Carl Van Doren and Carl Van Vechten were listed among her other references. She apparently submitted another application in 1948 in part to enable her to return to Europe to retrieve papers she left there when she departed at the outset of World War II. She received neither fellowship.

States when it was published in 1928, and the *Ladies Almanack* (also 1928) had garnered her much attention in spite, or perhaps because of, its underground status.[29] Thus, when she published her two collections of works in the 1920s, *A Book* and *A Night Among the Horses*, her reputation was already well-established.

Clearly, throughout her life and since her death Barnes's work has received considerable attention from her literary contemporaries. Much has been written about Eliot's praiseful (if odd) introduction to *Nightwood* and his work on editing that book as well as his work on editing *The Antiphon*, which was staged in 1958 and was the last major original major work Barnes completed, although she lived until 1982. She associated with and in the twenties was favorably compared in print to James Joyce. As Janet Flanner writes in her memoirs, "Djuna Barnes was the most important woman writer we had in Paris" (xvii). Dag Hammarskjold co-translated *The Antiphon* into Swedish. Monique Wittig has translated the short story collection *Spillway* into French.

Barnes's story "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady" initially appeared in 1925 in Paris in a collection of expatriate writing edited by Robert McAlmon for his own Contact Publishing Company. Other authors represented in that collection include Joyce, Pound, Hemingway, Stein and William Carlos Williams. Some such as Joyce have been canonized as major modernist authors; others, such as John Herman,

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[29] A satire of Natalie Barney and her lesbian salon, the *Almanack* was originally printed, with the help of Robert McAlmon, in a limited edition for circulation among Barnes's friends. The text contained original illustrations by Barnes, which were colored by herself and by Tylia Perlmutter. Fearing legal trouble due to its risque content, the author was referred to only as "A Lady of Fashion" (Herring, *Djuna* 151-153).

have faded into obscurity. Still others, such as H.D. and Mina Loy, have also received fairly recent critical attention, due in part to a feminist re-evaluation of the canonical construction of modernism. Not accidentally, Barnes is the first author to be considered in Bonnie Kime Scott's revisionist anthology, *The Gender of Modernism*.

Recent scholarship, however, has focused and continues to focus on the novels and the play, while Barnes's poetry and stories have been largely overlooked. Although there is an abundance of Barnes scholarship on *Nightwood* and the verse tragedy *The Antiphon*, and a fair amount (mostly of lesbian criticism) on her satirical *Ladies Almanack*, there has been little scholarly attention focused on her short stories. [30] This is in spite of a spate of activity in the 1980s and 1990s that re-affirmed Barnes's place in lesbian, feminist and modernist literature, such as Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940* (1986) and more recent work by Karla Jay and Laura Doan.

In 1929 "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady" was published again by Horace Liveright, New York, in Barnes's collection of stories, poems and plays, *A Night among the Horses*. In 1960, Robert Giroux, then an editor at Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, expressed an interest in publishing a *Selected Works of Djuna Barnes*. For this volume, which also includes *Nightwood* and the *The Antiphon*, Barnes revised several of her previously published stories. The collection of stories included within the *Selected Works*, which was published in 1962, is titled *Spillway* and includes "Cassation," a revised version of "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady." It is in the

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[30] See especially Miriam Fuchs, "Djuna Barnes: Spillway Into Nightmare" (1981) and Carolyn Allen, "Writing Toward Nightwood: Djuna Barnes's Seduction Stories" (1991).

revised form that is has been republished since, in collections such as *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* and the *Collected Stories of Djuna Barnes* (1996).[31]

Although written a decade before *Nightwood*, "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady" has key similarities to the novel, in particular in the way it abruptly juxtaposes references to the failed battles of European empire with a queer erotic plot. The source seems to be a story Barnes heard from a Paris acquaintance, Tylia Perlmutter, about a Russian dancer who becomes involved with a married Italian woman. The Italian woman invites the Russian to live with her and be a caretaker to her retarded child (McAlmon 24). Besides making use of this story, Barnes undoubtedly also must have used her experiences in or observations of Berlin, where she lived for a brief time on a journalism assignment for McCall's magazine, in the late summer of 1921.

Barnes herself describes Tylia and her sister, Bronja, in an article for *Charm* magazine titled "The Models Have Come to Town" (1924). Young, pretentious and sophisticated, Tylia does seem a plausible model for the character of Katya, the storyteller. She sprinkles her declarations with foreign words and frequently ends them with the phrase "isn't it?" In the piece, Barnes captures her style, affectation and ennui:

> "America!" Tylia opens her eyes, sighs and lights her tenth cigarette. "America for me is the only *volupté.* Why? Because in all the pictures that I seen of your American life, everything is arranged so

[31] There are three unpublished typescripts of the story which indicate at least some of the work Barnes and her proofreader did in preparing "Cassation" for the *Selected Works*. The typescripts are located in the Barnes Collection at McKeldin Library, University of Maryland.

> symmetrically, the trains have space, the space is full of buildings and your buildings full of money. Isn't it?"[32]

When Chester Page asked Barnes to describe what life was like in Berlin in the 1920s, she replied, in her usual elliptical manner, "It was very nice, things so cheap for us that you felt almost ashamed to be there. Full of buggers from America who bought boys cheap. The only thing I bought was a blouse. You read my story, 'A Young [sic] Girl Tells a Story to a Lady'" (qtd in Herring 97-98). In spite of the claims of some critics who read the story as being ungrounded in time**,** the setting for "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady" is clearly Europe between the wars. The initial scene, described by Katya—the eponymous "little girl"— is in a Berlin café, where she first meets the mysterious and enigmatic Elvira (re-named Gaya in the 1962 version). There, heavy German men watch American "light and laughing women." Katya is a Russian dancer who settles for a while in Berlin before moving on to Paris (the location from which she is presumably telling the story to an unidentified listener). Elvira/Gaya is an Italian who studied English and German. Her husband, Ludwig, is German, but he and his wife speak to each other in English, so that at first Katya cannot discern their nationality. The listener (who some critics presume to be Barnes herself and thus American) is not expressly identified with a single country, but Katya presumes she, too, knows Berlin, and knows enough of German to understand her foreign phrases. All of this is evidence of the migrations, displacement, and European internationalism that marked European cities in the twenties.

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[32] "The Models Have Come to Town." *Interviews*. Ed. Alyce Barry. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1985. 299. Originally published in *Charm*, November 1924: 86.

The many references to Germany, especially Berlin, the occasional use of German vocabulary, the references to Russia, Italy and Paris, and to thwarted military action, evoke Europe between the wars. There are numerous changes between the 1925 and 1962 versions of Barnes's story, some fairly substantive. As entries in her daybooks attest,[33] it was Giroux who suggested the idea of a *Selected Works*. Barnes was also in contact with Peter du Sautoy at Faber & Faber about their edition of *Spillway*, a collection of ten stories originally published in the 1920s. In the late 1950s to early 1960s, Barnes was hard at work preparing these stories for publication; there are references in her daybooks to letters sent to her editors about everything from copyright to approving the jacket blurb. At one point, apparently overburdened with work, Barnes requested the services of a proofreader in the employ of Farrar, Straus.[34] There is also a note in Barnes's hand on one of the drafts of "Cassation" "last copy for Frances" – the assistant provided to her by Farrar, Straus, Cudahy.[35] One notable change between the versions is the deletion of the dedication line, "to T.W.," Thelma Wood, her lover when Barnes wrote "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a

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[33] Barnes's own daybooks provide evidence of her preoccupation with this list of stories and their revisions during the years 1959-1961. The daybook from 1962 is not available. (Barnes Collection, McKeldin Library, University of Maryland).

[34] In a letter to Robert Giroux dated 8/6/61, Barnes wrote "And don't forget I want to see cover and such wording as it carries. And I am about dying with nine books to proofread: I shall want the aid of your proofreader when I stagger in with the galleys."

[35] Since Barnes burned many of her papers toward the end of her life, it's impossible to be certain about which stories she spent the most time revising. The various extant drafts of "Cassation" give us a glimpse into the woman and the continued development of her ideas at a time even her most recent biographer, Phillip Herring, is all too willing to write off as a reclusive, non-productive period of her life.

Lady." Although they maintained sporadic contact until Wood's death in 1970, the affair had ended by 1931.

In sharp contrast to the publication history of the other two works in the collection, *Nightwood* and *The Antiphon*, there is every reason to believe that Barnes is solely responsible for the revisions to the stories.[36] Although she remained in contact with T.S. Eliot during these years (he was then still an editor at Faber and Faber), he did not serve as an editor to this work.[37] Moreover, with one exception, noted below, there seems to be no evidence in her daybooks or in her correspondence during this period of Barnes's soliciting or receiving input about the content of the stories.

The narrator of "Cassation" is a young woman, Katya, who is telling the story to an older woman, to whom she refers as Madame. Katya's story is about her experience with another woman, Gaya. Katya, now nineteen, is Russian but has lived in Berlin for three years and plans to settle in Paris. When she first arrived in Germany, enamored of the ballet, she frequented a cafe where she regularly saw a mysterious woman. This forty year old woman, Gaya, appears wealthy and is accompanied by her husband, Ludwig, who is the only man in the story. In contrast to

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[36] T.S. Eliot and Emily Holmes Coleman are responsible for the extensive revisions to *Nightwood* (see Plumb's *Djuna Barnes* Nightwood: *The Original Version and Related Drafts*); Eliot edited *The Antiphon*, a contentious endeavor for both Barnes and Eliot. In contrast to his glowing—if misleading--preface to *Nightwood*, Eliot's faint and puzzled praise led Barnes to complain that she had never before seen a jacket blurb that "so resembles a shroud" (January 9, 1957, letter to Eliot, Barnes Collection). See Fuchs for full details of the battle over the final text of the play.

[37] The conflicts that arose over the text and staging of her verse tragedy might have contributed to a rift in their professional relationship. See Herring, *Djuna* chapters 13 and 14 *passim*; De Salvo 262-4; and especially Lynda Curry, "'Tom Take Mercy': Djuna Barnes's Drafts of *The Antiphon*" in Broe 286-98.

Gaya, who is described as strong and high-spirited, Ludwig is described as small and effeminate. His role in Gaya's life seems minor.

One day Katya and Gaya are drawn together and the older woman invites Katya home. For most of the remainder of the story, Katya becomes a disinterested narrator of the misfortunes of her friend and her friend's family. Gaya tells Katya that she left Italy, her birthplace, at a young age to marry a German and live in Berlin. She tried to integrate her past with the present by decorating her house with Italian furniture and by speaking both Italian and German.

The description of Gaya's house makes Katya seem childlike, which emphasizes the difference in age between Gaya and Katya. The furnishings seem to dwarf Katya, and particular attention is paid to their massive size and the general disorder of the house. The most lavish description is of a war painting which hangs in the bedroom and seems to run together "in encounter" with the bed. Gaya's child, whose name and sex are not at first disclosed, lies in the bed making buzzing sounds. Katya is struck by the fact that Gaya doesn't refer to the child at all. Gaya drinks a little wine, insists that Katya stay, throws herself on the bed, her hair spread around her, and falls asleep. Later that night she puts Katya to bed in a separate room. Katya remains with Gaya for a year.

During her year's stay, Katya describes scenes in which the two women walk together, have philosophical conversations, and discuss the state of civilization. After that year together, when the condition of Gaya's child, Valentine, worsens, Gaya, in the central monologue of the story, tries to convince Katya to stay and care for the child. Gaya claims that she herself is too old to be able to communicate with

Valentine and that her husband is incapable. In spite of Gaya's emotional appeal, Katya refuses and leaves.

Katya, however, does visit her friend one last time. Entering the child's bedroom, she realizes that Gaya is finally communicating with the child, Valentine. Mother and daughter are in bed together with "no human sounds between them" just a "buzzing cry" (392). By way of explanation Gaya gets up from the bed to tell Katya that she was surprised to realize that she herself is able to do what is necessary for her daughter.

Gaya's request, Katya's refusal and later return form the climax and denouement of the story. From Gaya's appeal to Katya we learn the most detail about Gaya and Ludwig's marriage and about the child. The three year old Valentine has been retarded from birth and can only make buzzing noises. Gaya is her daughter's caretaker, but too many years and experiences prevent her from communicating on the child's level. She reveals that she has "educated" Katya as part of a master plan, for only someone young, still malleable and unaffected can "climb into [the child's] bereavement and share the damnation of the innocent" since the mother cannot (389). Gaya is detached from her German husband who "can't bear anything of his sorrow," from Valentine, and from her past. The closest she can get to the child is to provide a surrogate, but Katya is unwilling to sacrifice herself.

Due to the framing device, the story consists of two separate narratives. One, the story of the relationship between Gaya and Katya, how Gaya wants to make use of Katya. Katya goes along as far as she does because in a sense she is seduced by the older woman. Early in the story, Katya is taken by the woman's physical presence.

Valentine's presence in the bed, however, interrupts and redirects the sexual scenario. The narrative moves from suggestive sexuality to the needs of the child, but in both plot lines, Gaya is attempting to re-form Katya according to her own desires, whether they be pseudo-sexual or to make her a surrogate mother.

But the story is also in part about the narrator telling a story to a woman who herself remains silent throughout the course of the story, and so assumes the role of audience or voyeur. The story begins and ends in direct address to this woman. The story opens with the question: "Do you know Germany, Madame, Germany in the spring?" (382). Katya twice interrupts her storytelling to pose similar questions, such as "Sometimes it is wonderful in Germany, Madame, *nicht wahr* [isn't it]?" (387), and "Sometimes it is beautiful in Berlin, Madame, *nicht wahr*?" (391). Katya concludes her macabre tale by calmly asking her listener, "Things are like that when one travels, *nicht wahr*, Madame?" (392).

These questions become a seductive refrain. The narrator's lilting voice conveys youthful innocence and is in contrast to the bizarre and macabre tale she tells. Besides placing Madame in relation to Katya, these questions also help establish the cosmopolitan setting of the story. The characters are incipient personalities, determined by shifting locations; they are both fragile and fragmentary. Gaya, in spite of her travels and geographic dislocation, has tried to hold on to her Italian past. However, the one separation she cannot bridge is between herself and her daughter. She finally achieves union with her daughter by engaging in her daughter's non-human communication. This is an unnatural intimacy, however, one depending on Gaya's renouncing her humaneness to regress into a realm without words.

The militaristic background is emphasized more in the later version of the story. Its title, "Cassation," means a cessation, and usually refers to a military action, as in the dismissal of a soldier. Katya quits Gaya's house when she discovers what sacrifice is expected of her; after her final return she is summarily dismissed by Gaya who tells her to "Go away." Moreover, Barnes is also ironically invoking the military and imperial history of Germany, and perhaps by implication, European imperial history. The statues of German emperors look like widows; Elvira/Gaya takes Katya to visit the imperial palace, where she strokes the cannons and discusses philosophy. One of the most striking images in the first bedroom scene (before the presence of the child is discovered) is the war painting that hangs over the bed, seemingly "in encounter" with it. Instead of charging to victory, the generals in the painting are in league with the "bleeding ranks of the dying" (385). That Barnes is using this material ironically as perhaps a critique of Europe's patriarchal past that has been devastated by the first World War, there is the character of Ludwig, the weak husband who is unable to cope and whose lack of potency is his defining characteristic.

One theme not adequately addressed above is the sexual or seductive atmosphere of the stories. As noted, this story is one of three that have been considered "seduction stories" wherein a younger person tells a story to an older but unidentified listener. Carolyn Allen, moreover, reads these stories as prefiguring *Nightwood*.[38] Besides the ambiguity between storyteller and listener, "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady" also presents an ambiguous relationship between the two

[38] See her insightful essay, "Writing Toward *Nightwood,*" Allen's focus, however, is on the suggestive, often queer erotics of the plots rather than the heroics, the militaristic elements and imperial allusions which, I argue, are key elements to the settings of the stories as well as the novel.

women in the story, Katya and Elvira/Gaya. In this twosome, it is Gaya who is the storyteller, and as such she enchants and in effect seduces Katya into giving up her ambition to remain with her, until, that is, her demands become too great and Katya leaves.

Much to the consternation of Barnes herself, the sexual overtones were commented on by a reader of the earlier version, Rolf Ekner, a Swedish translator who was working on "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady." In response to his inquiry about whether the story is about lesbians, Barnes denied intending such a reading.[39] The typescripts of the later version of the story, only the last of which is dated (April 1960), chronicle Barnes's revision of three passages in an apparent attempt to reduce the sexual elements in the story.

Revisions such as these can be read either as corrections--that is, as a clarification of original intent; or they can be read as revision in the literal sense of the word: an author looking at prior work in a new way and intentionally changing the emphasis, writing, in a sense, a different story while retaining elements from the original. In the case of "Cassation," I would argue the latter. In much of Barnes's work, there is often an unlikely juxtaposition of motif and theme. She is thematically obsessed with religion, with European imperial and military history, with sexuality, with the sexually and socially eccentric, with the animal world in contrast to the human world, especially on the issue of communication and personal relationships. Like the military painting and the bed with the nearly non-human child, these themes

[39] Barnes letter to Ekner, February 16, 1960. Barnes Collection, McKeldin Library.

often "run together in encounter" in Barnes's work.[40] Moreover, it's in these textual encounters that Barnes simultaneously opens up queer narrative space and offers a pointed (sometimes humorous, sometimes macabre) critique of imperialism.

[40] Barnes applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1930, and it has been noted that in this application, which was to study the history of the Jew and the European Court, she clearly was thinking ahead to *Nightwood* (Plumb, *Nightwood* ix-x). But for an example about the way themes and ideas were juxtaposed in Barnes's mind, consider the second part of this application. She also proposed to study "the French nunneries of the middle ages" to consider the "ladies of quality who were lodged within [the nunnery] walls." The object of this inquiry was to write a book on "the femanistic [sic], militaristic and religious activities of that time" (Barnes Collection, McKeldin Library).

Part II: The Uninhabited Angel: *Nightwood*'s Narrative Iconoclasm

> The Baron nodded. He was troubled. 'My family is preserved because I have it only from the memory of one single woman, my aunt; therefore, it is single, clear and unalterable. In this I am fortunate; through this I have a sense of immortality. Our basic idea of eternity is a condition that *cannot vary*. It is the motivation of marriage. No man really wants his freedom. He gets a habit as quickly as possible - it is a form of immortality.'
>
> 'And what's more,' said the doctor, 'we heap reproaches on the person who breaks it, saying that in so doing he has broken the image of our safety.' (*Nightwood* 112)

When I first read Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, I postponed reading T.S. Eliot's introduction until I had finished the novel itself. I didn't want to be unduly influenced by his reading; having come to the end of the novel, I anxiously read Eliot's words, looking for some guidance about how to come to terms with Barnes's bizarre text. Instead, I struggled to come to terms with Eliot's introduction; I wondered if we had in fact read the same novel. Eliot's inordinate focus on the character of Dr. Matthew O'Connor seemed particularly perplexing. Surely O'Connor is a character to contend with, but what of the others? Of Felix whose birth narrative opens the novel, and of Robin Vote and her relationships with Nora Flood and Jenny Petherbridge that become the focus of the novel's latter two thirds and especially its peculiar denouement? Could a satisfying reading really be accomplished by placing O'Connor at the center as Eliot seemed to insist on doing?

A few critics, including Philip Herring, Barnes's most recent biographer, have likened O'Connor to Eliot's Tiresias in *The Waste Land* - as an eternal androgynous figure who is condemned to see and explain all in the novel (Herring 210; Gerstenberger, "Radical Narrative" 38). Such a correspondence might be encouraged by Eliot's own notes that accompany *The Waste Land*, in which, in spite of the fragmented form of the poem, he claims that it becomes unified through Tiresias' vision:

> Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem. (72)

In his introduction to *Nightwood*, Eliot perceives a similar unifying figure in the character of Dr. Matthew O'Connor; he asserts that O'Connor is of "profound importance when seen as constituent of a whole pattern" (xiii). Rather than admit the contradiction between a unifying vision and what Eliot acknowledges as the doctor's futile storytelling, Eliot's sympathy for O'Connor is aroused by the doctor's tales. According to Eliot talking is "the only thing [O'Connor] can do for [Nora]," and his collapse at the end of the penultimate chapter is a result of "the strain of squeezing himself dry for other people and getting no sustenance in return" (xiii) - itself a curious maternal metaphor.

While it is notable that both Barnes and Eliot make use of the androgyne, Eliot insists that the storyteller is central to an attempt at extracting meaning from Barnes's fragmented narrative when her novel seems to resist such unification, and O'Connor's breakdown records the futility of asserting comprehensive and controlling master narratives. In contrast to the unifying vision of Tiresias, *Nightwood* depicts a variety of subversive and competing inscriptions. As O'Connor himself declares, "Life is not to be told, call it as loud as you like, it will not tell itself" (129). Moreover, Tiresias, the mythic figure Eliot claims helps unify *The Waste Land*, because he "sees all," is a significantly silent Cassandra, and says relatively little. In contrast, the logorrheic O'Connor's claims about what he has seen in his mortal lifetime make him the object of derision— "remember your century at least!" (164) one of his listeners exclaims in the middle of one of O'Connor's many dubious stories.

Thus by his curious focus in his introduction to *Nightwood,* Eliot ironically validated a work whose own narrative contradicts the thrust towards universal significance and meaning that he claims underlies *The Waste Land*. Nevertheless, there are a number of similarities between these two major modernist works. Barnes's novel explores many of the same themes as Eliot's poem, common modernist themes though they be: the decline of Western civilization, both in depicted as a literal fall as well as a fall from a position of authority; and alienation, expressed through character who seem both literally lost in time and geography, as well as disassociated from themselves, and especially those around them. And of course both works are typical of modernism in terms of structure. Both *Nightwood* and *The Waste Land* are fragmented, non-linear texts, both highly allusive and both seem to undermine (or at

least make exceeding difficult) the reader's attempt to find unity, consistency and coherence. Eliot famously noted the poetic nature of Barnes's prose, with its dense images and scenes, and both works lack an explanatory objective narrative voice to provide context to content.

Ultimate, however, *Nightwood* is a more subversive text than *The Waste Land*; it empahtically undermines not just Enlightenment categories and structures of knowledge, but also subversive categories, such as lesbian. Barnes's novel effectively undermines all totalizing, unifying narratives and critiques the quest for coherence.[41] As Cheryl Plumb notes, in spite of the numerous rejections her manuscript received due to the novel's perplexing form, Barnes "had no interest in compromise that would produce a realistic novel, or in what she labeled the 'safety' of realistic novels" (xi).

Careful reading of Barnes's first chapter reveals how subversive is her use of both historical and fictional narratives. Barnes begins *Nightwood* with a peculiar creation narrative set against the backdrop of an Empire—the Hapsburg—the reader knows will soon fall. The novel begins with the birth of the 'hero,' Felix Volkbein. But the heroic thrust to his narrative is immediately undermined by the various details we learn of his birth and his parents, his notably mannish mother and effeminate father. What we learn, too, is that Felix, like his father before him, isn't really a hero but wants desperately to be one. As eastern European Jews, Felix and his father have been enslaved not only by the culturally inscribed role of diasporic, outcast Jew, but

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[41] For Eliot, the mythic method is a way for his contemporaries, notably Joyce, "of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. . .. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible in art" ("*Ulysses*, Order and Myth" 178). As I argue, Barnes's aesthetics aim to do just the opposite.

also by the idea of an ordered and linear past. Wishing an end to the uncertainties of diaspora, father and son are both obsessed with social hierarchies which they seek to master by subjecting themselves within.

The first chapter, which focuses on Felix and his family, seems to have little to do with the rest of the novel, and in particular the lesbian erotic plot that seems to become the narrative focus as the novel develops. As with "Cassation," Barnes challenges the reader with an odd and abrupt juxtaposition of a presumably heroic narrative with a queer erotic plot. Notably, Felix is the only European among the novel's major characters, and his precarious status as European is made emphatically clear. Although from the first chapter he seems to be the novel's peculiar hero, he desires not to be propelled into a heroic plot of challenges and adventures. Instead, he seems to want time to stand still, even to go backwards.

As Donna Gerstenberger notes, the "concern with stasis runs throughout the novel." Felix's desire for Robin, as with his desire for a barony, or an unproblematic European identity, is indicative of his deeper desire for an image, since "An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties" ("Radical Narrative" 111). As with the image he has of his family, Felix declares that it is "preserved because I have it only from the memory of one single woman, my aunt; therefore it is single, clear and unalterable" (112). As Gerstenberger notes, "Precisely because [Felix's image of his family] is single and unalterable, it is static and inauthentic in the way the image must be for Barnes, since it claims in a single and unmediated act to capture reality, in Saussurean terms, the signified by the signifier" (Gerstenberger, "Radical Narrative" 135-136), the thing by its rhetorical representation.

The subversion of images and identity in *Nightwood* doesn't simply function to indicate Barnes's doubts about the possibility of narrative truth. By constantly disrupting the certainties in fixed images and identities in favor of flux and contradiction, *Nightwood* asserts its faith in the interrogation of traditional beliefs, disruption of narrative expectations, and iconoclasm of culturally revered images. Eliot is correct that O'Connor is a crucial character in Barnes's novel, but this is true for almost the opposite reason that Eliot posits. Instead of unifying the narrative, O'Connor as storyteller calls attention to *Nightwood* itself as narrative, thereby validating its own existence as story at the same time that it destabilizes, in almost every case, the explanatory power of narrative based on the notion of univocal historical origins.

But even after accepting the incongruity and uncertainty of Barnes's text one is still perplexed by the brief final chapter, "The Possessed," which has often been seen as a coda to the novel (Frank 32). The indeterminate ending of *Nightwood* is in contrast to and mocks the novel's beginning, and perhaps by implication all creation narratives.

Nightwood illustrates the failure of its characters to survive when they attempt to define their world in fixed terms and established certainties. I would read the novel as a series of cultural narratives that do not fulfill their trajectories. The birth narrative of Felix is the first, and Felix is crucial to the structure of the novel because he sets in motion a number of other narratives whose traditional ends are disrupted.

Structurally, the stories of Felix and Robin bracket the novel. We begin with Felix being born and end with Robin descending with the dog. While Joseph Frank

has argued that Felix's chapter doesn't belong, Eliot at first didn't think the final chapter belonged since it detracted from O'Connor's final speech and decline. Felix's narrative frame records the decline of western civilization in the twentieth century. Felix is a man whose motive was determined by submission to "Old Europe"; his quest leads him finally to the only true noble in the book: the Grand Duke Alexander of Russia, the brother of the deceased, meaning the defeated and deposed, Czar Nicholas, whose empire has fallen. Thus Felix, born under the Hapsburg crest into a dying empire, in his final gesture supplicates himself before a Romanov. Felix takes his final bow in the second to last chapter, and in this final act of submission, he finally goes too far. Instead of his customary slight bow, he is described as though he has lost his human self: "his head in his confusion making a complete half-swing, as an animal will turn its head away from a human in mortal shame" (123).

Thus Felix continues with the self-deception and self-abnegation inherited from his father as the Jew who tries to elevate himself by aligning himself with his oppressors. His marriage to Robin is motivated by his desire to acquire a male heir, someone to whom he can pass on the deception. What the relationship between Felix and Robin represents is the only attempt among the major characters in the novel to exist in a traditional heterosexual relationship. (Felix's parents are the other heterosexual couple depicted in the novel, but they are described as part of his past, not witnessed in marriage. Nevertheless, Barnes's undermines the traditional gender identities of his parents by describing Hedvig as masculine and Guido as effeminate.)

With the birth of Robin and Felix's son, Guido, the family becomes not only *Nightwood*'s nuclear family, but also its archetypal holy family. But instead of being

a worthy progeny to his false barony, the child is mentally and physically defective. So concerned has Felix been with fixity and stasis, that he has produced an inorganic heir. The child, he says, "does not grow up" (120). Felix's own family is "preserved" he says, because he has "it from the memory of one single woman." It is thus "clear and unalterable." "Eternity as a condition that *cannot vary*" thus depends on a univocal narrative. To Felix such desire for permanence is also "the motivation for marriage." Instead of "freedom," man wants "habit" to insure "immortality" (112).

But Felix's marriage is broken, broken by Robin. In response to Felix's conclusions about eternity, O'Connor rejoins, "we heap reproaches on the person who breaks it, saying that in so doing he has broken the image - of our safety" (112). With Robin's departure from the Oedipal triad, Felix instead tries to fix her in a Christ-like role, idealized in her absence. As he explains to O'Connor, he "managed always [when questioned about "the Baronin"] to direct [Guido's] mind to expect her" (116). Like all of Felix's plots, this is an expectation that will not be fulfilled.

Felix exists in contrast to Robin, but as the Wandering Jew his identity is lost in trying to falsely assimilate into the hegemonic narratives that exclude him. In contrast to the wanderings of Felix, depicted as something of a religious quest, Robin lacks volition, and is therefore not motivated by anything except instinct. Her conclusion, though it seems to end in the same beastly gesture as Felix's is actually in contrast to Felix's narrative trajectory. Robin's natural wanderings lead her away from relationships that aim to fix her. Thus not only does *Nightwood* reject the heterosexual love plot, it critiques the bourgeois ideals of sexual fidelity in favor of freedom, even if those ideals are articulated in a lesbian relationship.

Felix wants memory of his past to be fixed, and the images retrieved in human memory are static. In contrast to human memory, the memory that animals have is instinctual. As O'Connor says, "Animals find their way about largely by the keenness of their nose. . . .we have lost ours in order not to be one of them, and what have we in its place? A tension in the spirit which is the contraction of freedom" (118-19). Thus it is that Nora's dog, true to O'Connor's prediction, is able to sniff out Robin in the final scene. When she first met Nora, Robin rejected the beast world in favor of her relationship. But when Nora tried to contain the "uninhabited angel" Robin fled (148).

Nightwood is about the futility of fixing identity. Robin modulates between human and animal. She is described as a "beast turning human" (37). In the end, she modulates toward beast. Especially in her marriage to Felix, as wife, and as a mother her identity is forced upon her. She rebels from both traditional roles. But simply to claim her as a lesbian, and therefore a misfit in a heterosexual role, is limiting and misleading, too. For although she appears happy with Nora for a time, there is in her a primal urge to wander, especially when her lovers try to force an identity on her. Although early lesbian criticism (most notably by Bertha Harris) tended to read the lesbian relationship as triumph of self over women's culturally prescribed identity as wife and mother, such reading fails to account for Robin's failed relationships with Nora and Jenny. By problematizing her relationships with women, Barnes will not allow us to fix Robin's identity as lesbian, or *Nightwood* as a novel primarily concerned with lesbian relationships, although that is one of its many themes.

Jenny Petherbridge has also been married, four times in fact (65). And as Cheryl Plumb reveals, in earlier drafts Nora was depicted as a mother to two sons (xvii). This is not to say that they are all, therefore, bisexuals instead of lesbians, but that sexuality doesn't fit facile categorizations. This I think is more congruent with the themes established in the book. Shari Benstock notes that the "perversion of *Nightwood* is not the depravity of homosexuality, the horrors of transsexuality, or the ugliness of women's hidden nature, but the tragic effect of woman's estrangement from her own self" (263). I would alter Benstock's formulation somewhat to say that the estrangement in *Nightwood* is not just of a woman from herself, but of people from their culturally, and counterculturally, assigned roles. Thus Robin leaves Nora, and later leaves Jenny Petherbridge, too. In the end she is doing what is most natural to her; wandering, being beastly, and refusing to be understood. Thus this "uninhabited angel," the ethereal being who will not habituate to an identity, is Judith Butler's queer performative incarnate, defined solely by her actions instead of any prior identity.

Robin is a modern (or postmodern) symbol of the futility and falseness of coherent personality, a critique of the unified humanist subject. We cannot adequately read the encounter between her and the dog because such encounters are not in our cultural lexicon. If Felix's behavior is overdetermined by his overwhelming desire to be inscribed in the text of the dominant culture, Robin is necessarily inscrutable both to those she encounters in the novel and to readers because she successfully resists culturally determined inscriptions.

Nonetheless, it is the continual desire for Robin that propels the remainder of the plot. Here is where I think a too literal reading of Barnes's biography into the aesthetic narrative can mislead even as it provides some illumination. Does *Nightwood* actually contain two main plots - one that is a historically specific critique of western society, the pre-holocaust, anti-fascist novel that Jane Marcus describes in "Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Woman's Circus Epic", and a second one that is about the endless deferral of desire, about postmodern uncertainty and impossibility, that is the theme of the Robin-Nora plot? Do these two plots complement, or contradict? That is, if the first is a critique of patriarchal institutions and master narratives, how does the second, focused on Robin her female lovers and the impossibility of desire, figure in here?

One of the few certainties of the novel is that Nora's (or anyone's) desire for Robin will never be fulfilled. In this sense, the novel transcends homosexual-heterosexual binaries. Although she is central to the novel as the object of desire, as a character Robin is the most inscrutable. She is first introduced as having fainted but is unrevivable. Thus from the beginning she is the object of a quest: O'Connor's, with Felix in tow, to revive her, to bring her back to the world. Her first words upon being revived indicate that she "was all right," that she didn't desire any intervention, and she returns to her sleepwalker state (35). The attempts of other characters to fix Robin, either to understand her or to fix her in relation to themselves, likewise proves futile. She rejects the roles of wife to Felix and mother to Guido. She succumbs to the desires of the others because she herself lacks any volition. The "beast turning human" takes action only when she begins to realize what being human means, that it

means becoming a part of another person in a social relationship. The only words she utters to Felix are of rejection: "Go to hell!" she curses as she suffers the pains of impending childbirth (48). After Guido is born, she yells, "I didn't want him!" (49).

Robin's affinity for animal life, her inhuman nature, is established at the beginning and ending of the Nora-Robin-Jenny narrative. The first encounter between Robin and Nora at the circus follows Robin's rejection of marriage and motherhood. But in that initial surreal encounter with beast life, Robin rejects it for human relationship. In response to the lion who is facing her and nearly, but not quite, weeping, Robin "rose straight up" and tells Nora that she doesn't want to be there (54). The lioness recognizes a beastly affinity in Robin. Robin, however, articulates a "wish for a home" and describes love belonging between the two women from which separation seemed impossible (55). In spite of her relationship with Nora, Robin has not lost her beast nature. Increasingly, Nora fears that if she disturbs anything in the house, Robin "might lose the scent of home" (56). The result of Nora's love is to contain Robin: "in the heart of the lover will be traced, as an indelible shadow, that which he loves. In Nora's heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity, and about it for its maintenance ran Nora's blood. . . . Robin was now beyond timely changes, except in the blood that animated her" (56).

Shortly after the beginnings of Robin's wanderings, Nora has her first dream of her grandmother. With the entry of Robin into it, it is made complete, and is not to "be dreamed again" (62). In the dream Nora has a confrontation with the "room [that] was taboo" (62), the room that is "saturated with the lost presence of her grandmother, who seemed in the continual process of leaving it" (63). Her memory of her

grandmother is "'drawn upon' as a prehistoric ruin is drawn upon, symbolizing her life out of her life, and which now appeared to Nora as something being done to Robin, Robin disfigured and eternalized by the hieroglyphics of sleep and pain" (63).

At the first sight of Robin and Jenny, Nora, speechless, experiences a "sensation of evil, complete and dismembering" (64). Thus evil is dismemberment, fragmentation. But wholeness in this novel seems impossible, a deception. When Nora and O'Connor discuss Robin toward the end of the novel, O'Connor tries to interpret Robin according to her animal nature. He tells Nora "to be an animal, [means to be] born at the opening of the eye, going only forward, and, at the end of the day, shutting out memory with the dropping of a lid" (135). Animal nature exists without memory; for animals sleep does not bring any painful recollections. Thus by yoking her grandmother and Robin together, using Robin to fulfill her unrequited desire, her memory for her grandmother, Nora concludes that it is she herself who is the source of evil. Fragmented, fossilized in her dream, Robin will now "die over and over" (149).

Thus to fulfill her own human needs in response to the loss of her grandmother, Nora violates Robin's animal needs, fixes and fragments her. In discussing Robin with Felix, O'Connor refers not to personal memory, as with Nora's dream, but appropriately to cultural memory, what has been Felix's obsession:

> The most fossilized state of our recollection is attested to by our murderers and those who read every detail of crime with a passionate and hot interest . . . . it is only by such extreme measures that the average man can remember something long ago; truly, not that he

> remembers, but that crime itself is the door to an accumulation, a way to lay hands on the shudder of a past that is still vibrating. (117-118)

Thus the past still vibrates, is in flux. It is only in our desire for order, for the creation of "our faulty racial memory," our social narratives of division and hierarchy that we make static what is chaotic:

> So the reason for our cleanliness becomes apparent; cleanliness is a form of apprehension; our faulty racial memory is fathered by fear. Destiny and history are untidy; we fear memory of that disorder. Robin did not. (118)

As O'Connor tells Nora that Robin, due to her animal nature, does not share her concern for personal memory, likewise she tells Felix that Robin doesn't share his concern for "cleanliness," for social order.

Thus if culture is based on memory and if memory is the necessary stasis applied to a "still vibrating" past, then the two contradictory plots I posited earlier reveal the largest theme Barnes tackles and perhaps the one binary she does not undo: the opposition between nature and culture. With the character of Robin Vote, Barnes uses the figure of the American primitive and contrasts this figure to European historical and cultural modernity. Robin's primitivism is described as a decidedly American one; she is "meet of child and desperado" (35), calling up images of the innocent and the outlaw. Moreover, it is Robin's Americanness that causes her husband Felix, the pathetic and anachronistic quester hero of the novel, to be attracted to her. Felix is interested in Robin because of what he perceives as her innocence and consequent malleability and wants her to become the repository of cultural memory,

which for him means European history. Robin's resistance to being confined by the desires of other characters is indicated by her repeated returns to America. For Barnes, this peculiarly primitivized, pre-civilized America is a place which exists outside the narrative and erotic confines of western civilization.[42]

Thus in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* various plots, cultural narratives are undermined: progressive history, hereditary aristocracy, Christianity, humanism, heterosexual love plots, bourgeois values. Felix's narrative undermines the foundation of post-Enlightenment ideals; Nora's, the narratives that govern personal relationships. O'Connor's narrative, however, is about narrative itself. The fact that he goes down at the end would seem to indicate the futility of storytelling. Perhaps if we take him to be the central figure this might be the case. But O'Connor is not the main character, nor the unifying vision. The point of Barnes's narrative is that no one of these stories is central; no one is privileged over the others; they are all interwoven. If there is anything that will successfully counter the hegemony of the master narratives that silence and deform, it is the practice of making more stories.

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[42] Notably, all the major characters in the novel—except Felix—are American. The critics who claim Barnes is writing outside of historic time might actually have a point after all. Although the historic frame is clearly indicated by the references to the Hapsburg Empire (still standing as Felix is born) and the collapse of the Russian Empire, those details all come from the Felix plot. Robin and the other Americans are thus the primitives—without a state, a history, living outside of recorded time (for more on the western construction of the primitive, see Goldberg, *Racist Culture*).

Chapter 3 – White Creole in the Metropole

Part I: Exhibitions and Repetitions: Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* and the World of Paris, 1937

Near the end of Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha Jansen, the protagonist, along with her companion for the evening, a gigolo named René, visits the Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques Appliqués à la Vie Moderne that was held in Paris in 1937. In keeping with the elliptical style of Rhys's experimental, modernist narrative, the only part of the Exhibition Sasha and René comment on is the Star of Peace, a monumental structure intended to symbolize the international harmony that the Exhibition was to have promoted. From the characters' vantage point by the Trocadéro entrance to the Exhibition grounds, however, the monument to peace would have been behind them. Before them lay the main site of the Exhibition, a grand vista displaying most prominently the pavilions of European nations. From the main entrance, aside from the Eiffel Tower, the buildings which dominated this view were the Nazi German pavilion and the Soviet Union pavilion located directly opposite. To the south, along the Left Bank, were located the pavilions of the regions of France. Further still, segregated from the rest of the fairgrounds and beyond the purview of visitors from the main entrance, were the pavilions of the French colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean.

The world, as an Exhibition promoter proclaimed, *had* come to Paris the summer and fall of 1937, though the display of monuments, material objects, and people both exceeded and undermined the planners' intentions. The world Sasha inhabits is a representation of the international modern world. In Rhys's novel her

characters, tellingly, have their backs to the Peace Monument; the Exhibition display before them is a sight Sasha has tried to avoid since the beginning of the novel. And the novel, likewise, averts its gaze from the Exhibition, focusing instead on characters who struggle to survive economically and emotionally in a world of deracinated people whose stories reveal the racial and sexual exclusions inherent in the nation.

Until recently, much criticism of the novel has read it as a character study of Sasha, a typical "Jean Rhys woman"–more pathetic than sympathetic, a singular figure of failure, defeated by her life and unable to get past her past–and has paid scant attention to the significance of setting the novel in 1937 in Paris. Ignoring the setting prevents readers from taking Rhys seriously as much more than a stylist in the modernist canon, a writer narrowly preoccupied with "women's emotional life" who lacked "an enlarged vision of the contemporary world" (Staley 84). Like other modernist women writers, Rhys contextualizes her characters' sufferings historically–if somewhat indirectly. This reading builds on more recent criticism which considers the significance of the setting[43]–Paris during the Exhibition, and the Exhibition during a time of escalating European national conflict.

Sasha's journey to the Exhibition in the penultimate scene completes a nightmare she has at the beginning of the novel. In that nightmare Rhys's protagonist is trapped in a London tube station and is looking for a way out. Instead of the way out, she is confronted by signs pointing to the Exhibition. The novel itself begins with oblique references to disturbing events from the main character's past, and the novel

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[43] See Judith Raiskin, *Snow on the Canefields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity*; Mary Lou Emery, *Jean Rhys at World's End: Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile*; Veronica Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole*; and Elaine Savory *Jean Rhys*.

unfolds as Sasha navigates her way through Paris over a period of ten days, fruitlessly trying to avoid places which are "saturated with the past" (91) life she led in Paris several years prior. The connection Rhys makes between literal space and inner conflict is made apparent from the beginning of Sasha's stay in Paris when she takes a room on a street called an impasse. That Sasha will fail to negotiate her way around the city and her pain is apparent by her lack of sense of direction: "north, south, east, west–they have no meaning for me" (26). As she wanders about the city, Sasha desires not progress, but stasis. Her past is painful and her future inconceivable. She remains in motion, however; not quite the flâneur of Benjamin's boulevards, Sasha's goal is to avoid the memories triggered by her surroundings. With careful "avoidance of certain cafés, of certain streets, of certain spots" (14), Sasha hopes to avoid the nightmare that haunts her.

The difficulty of coming to terms with a troubled past, while specific to Sasha's story, takes on greater meaning when we consider Rhys's West Indian origins and the place of the Caribbean, historically, in the shaping of the modern world. As Eric Hobsbawm writes, modern history, synonymous with western history–especially for the British who came to dominate the capitalist world they helped produce–depends upon the erasure of the histories of other peoples.[44] The diasporic, colonial world is also the past confronted. It is this world that the Exposition planners literally

[44] "It is still difficult, if not impossible, to look back dispassionately on that century which created world history because it created the modern capitalist world economy. For Europeans it carried a particular charge of emotion, because, more than any other, it was the European era in the world's history, and for the British among them it is unique because, and not only economically speaking, Britain was at its core. . . . For the rest of the world's peoples it was the era when all the past history, however long and distinguished, came to a necessary halt" (Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* 338).

pushed to the margin of the fairgrounds and that Rhys's plot recuperates. Although some critics might describe Rhys's historical frame as "after Victoria, before Hitler" (D'Acosta 390), this demarcation doesn't capture Rhys's perspective properly. As Hobsbawm notes, the nineteenth century continued to have its imperial effects well into the twentieth, and the British Empire was at its height just following World War I (Booth and Rigby 2). Historical references that would more closely capture the precarious nature of the "peace" between the wars might note instead that the novel is set in the year that Guernica was destroyed; that Rhys was writing while the Nuremberg laws were in effect; that the novel was published four months after *Kristallnacht*. Hitler's presence was felt in Europe in the 1930s well before the outbreak of war, and *Good Morning, Midnight's* sympathetic portrayal of displaced Russian Jewish characters is evidence of Rhys's awareness of the personal results of political disruptions Europe experienced with the coming of Stalin and the rise of Hitler.[45] Instead, the novel, with its circuitous narrative pattern, its modernist emphasis on repetition and memory, illustrates the unavoidable–and sometimes horrifying, but always interconnected–presence of a political and personal past.

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45 While there are scant references to political events in Rhys's letters, the entries that do mention politics are indicative of her sensitivity to the effect events of the thirties had on people's lives and well-being. In 1933 while on holiday near Brighton she wrote: "I came down here crazy with depression . . . . Berlin fell through. [Hitler was elected chancellor] Leslie's friend who is a Jew has packed up and gone to America or is going. There was so little money that I chose a month here instead of a week in Holland. So you see–I'm so horribly sorry things are rotten in America too. Sorry for myself too. For everybody. But it can't go on. It's impossible and incredible" (Letters 22).

Representing the Nation

Paris in 1937 was teeming with people from around the world, as both spectators of and participants in the Exhibition. During the six months it was open, 3.4 million visitors attended the sixth, last, and largest of the Paris World Fairs (Allwood 184). Obvious in retrospect is the Exhibition's display of the competitive nationalism of European empires: "Even though the organizers attempted to imbue the site with an optimistic modernism, the Exposition was saturated with an abrasive nationalism which served only to confirm the irreconcilability of major European states. It was the cultural equivalent of the military engagement shortly to follow" (Greenhalgh 130). The prescience of the Exhibition, however, was not lost on some contemporary observers. Located prominently in the lobby of the Spanish pavilion was the first showing of Picasso's *Guernica,* which prompted Michel Leiris to write, "Picasso is sending us our death announcement: everything we love is about to die" (qtd in Peer 47). The pending inter-European conflict was suggestively staged in architectural confrontations, especially, as has been most frequently commented on, by the location of the Nazi German pavilion and the Soviet Union pavilion directly facing each other.

Although the Soviet pavilion planners tried to increase the height of their building by using it as a pedestal for Vera Murkhina's statue, *Worker and Collective Farm Woman*, the German building, designed by Albert Speer and topped by a National Socialist eagle perched on a swastika, dominates the view from the main entrance. Inside, the pavilion offered screenings of Leni Riefenstahl's already controversial *Triumph of the Will*. A promotional brochure for the Nazi pavilion

proudly asserts Germany's role in modern technological progress: "Nobody can leave the Exposition without having the feeling that in Germany, and particularly on the railroads of the Reich, all the assets of modern technology are used to achieve the greatest possible safety" (*Deutsche Reichsbahn* 6). The front and back cover of the brochure, with its border illustrations of trains, chillingly complements the text in its celebration of recent industrial advances in rail travel, which a few years later would be utilized for mass transport to concentration camps.

Besides displaying cultural and technological products, an important part of the Paris Exhibition was the display of the nation itself, and how France in particular conceived of the role of the colonies in representations of *Grande France*. While other European nations housed their colonial exhibitions within their national buildings–except, of course, Germany, which had to surrender its colonial possessions per the Treaty of Versailles–as host nation, France exhibited its colonies in separate buildings. The Hobsbawm quotation I cite above calls attention to a defining aspect of western modernity: like the Creoles, hybrids, and diasporic communities it produces, modernity is based on an internal split. It is an historical narrative that produces an historical erasure, even while the evidence of that erasure, such as the segregated colonies that constituted the French pavilion, is blatantly evident.

The official welcome to the 1931 Exposition Coloniale Internationale à Paris acknowledged that "the colonies will . . . become the new battlefield in works of peace and progress" (qtd in Lebovics 52). If, as Walter Benjamin concludes, the world fairs were "summary smothering acts of imposed historical interpretation"

(Hinsley 120), the 1937 Exhibition amply demonstrated the place of the colony in the political and cultural economy of empire**.** In an effort to sell the idea of a Greater France,[46] an extensive French colonial section was located west of the Champs de Mars in pavilions built on huge pontoons floating on the Seine. There were separate buildings for Morocco, Tunisia, Guadeloupe, Indochina, Martinique, Madagascar, Algeria, Réunion and Corsica. Segregated from the main site, with no claim to be on terra firma, natives imported from the colonies labored for the profit of the Exhibition. Confined to the reconstructed "colony," "native artisans lived and worked in the display pavilions, and were not allowed to leave these areas without special permission from exhibition authorities" (Ezra 34). The French colonial natives were under constant surveillance of the steady stream of visitors and policed by organizers who made sure the profit from the products they produced while on display went to the Exhibition.[47] Rather than presenting an image of a unified nation, the presence of the natives in the metropole emphasized the distinction between colonizer and colonized.

Bodies and Commodities

The role of labor is among the myriad ironies of the Paris Exhibition. The original scheduled May Day opening had to be postponed due to a labor strike in

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[46] For a full analysis of the development of the twentieth-century idea of an imperial *Grande France* to rival Great Britain and the collusion of museum and Exposition exhibits in fostering cultural change, see Lebovics 64-83.

[47] The artisans were paid a salary; their earnings, however, "amounted to 1/5 the monthly salary of the French cashier who worked in the shops that sold their products" (Ezra 36).

Paris during construction of the Exhibition. Popular Front Prime Minister Léon Blum and General Commissioner of the Exposition Edmond Labbé colluded to subordinate all other concerns to the "national interest" of completing the construction, in spite of the fact that the labor struggles surrounding the Exposition "mirrored the class struggle outside the fairgrounds which was rapidly undermining the Popular Front" itself (August 47-48).

By emphasizing the role of economic necessity in her characters' present geographic location and their individual struggles, Rhys writes a counter-narrative to the triumphant and purportedly inclusive nationalism that is on display in the Exhibition. Three of the male characters--Sasha's former husband, Enno, the gigolo, René, and Nicolas Delmar--served in foreign armies, Enno for the French Foreign Legion during the first World War; René also purportedly fought for the French Foreign Legion, in Morocco, which he has just deserted by making his way through Franco's Spain. References to the Foreign Legion are indicative of France's imperial incursions into North Africa. The image suggested is of imperial Europe at war, producing not just exiles and émigrés but mercenaries, too, as national wars were fought by displaced people desperate and struggling to survive.[48] René in particular is in a precarious position. Without papers, he is in need of a fake passport to escape France for England, where he hopes to make his living selling his body to English women. The former Legionnaire, having deserted the battlefield for the bed, engages in erotic rather than heroic maneuvers now.

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[48] For more on colonial natives and their participation in and sacrifice to World War I see Lebovics, "Nearly one million natives of the colonies and external regions of France fought in World War I; 205,000 died for France" (62).

If the men in the novel are revealed to be defenders of nations to which they don't belong, the women are depicted as engaged in a different type of economic struggle. For Sasha, economic existence is dependant on appearance, on the exchange-value of the female body, and several of the jobs she's described as having held— as a hostess in a women's clothing shop, as a mannequin—emphasize the display of female bodies. Throughout the novel Sasha is preoccupied with being looked at. She perceives disdain in looks aimed her way, because she is getting old, because she is assumed to be English, because she is alien. In response to a malicious comment directed her way, Sasha concludes:

> Qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, la vieille? What the devil (translating it politely) is she doing here, that old woman? What is she doing here, the stranger, the alien, the old one? . . . I quite agree, too, quite. I have seen that in people's eyes all my life. I am asking myself all the time what the devil I am doing here. All the time. (46, ellipses in original)

As the city of consumption, Paris (per Benjamin) offers Sasha the promise of making herself anew. The appeal of the commodity, particularly as presented in a world's fair, is that it provides workers a way to "submit to being manipulated while enjoying their alienation from themselves and others" (Benjamin, "Paris" 152), making them participant in rather than passive observer of the modern world. The one certain aspect of Sasha's identity is that she doesn't fit in:

> Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis and miss, I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don't succeed, but look how hard I try. Three hours to choose a hat; every morning an hour and a

> half trying to make myself look like everybody else. Every word I say has chains around its ankles; every thought I think is weighted with heavy weights. (88)

Repeatedly, Sasha tries to recuperate from her personal failures and painful encounters by consuming. Among the activities that bring pleasure are buying a dress and then a hat and having her hair dyed. To achieve the dye color she wants she is told all her original color must be removed first before the cendre is applied. As Rhys depicts it, Sasha's self-fashioning is not just a display of self, but instead a mask, an obliteration. Sasha as consumer of self-image fits thematically in the with the novel's direct (and the Exposition's unintended) revelation that outward displays attempt to obliterate origins and history. If she is to be perceived as a spectacle, the proper appearance will shield her from her spectators' critical eyes. On one of her excursions about the city, on a street that houses "at least ten milliners" (58), Sasha sympathizes with a bald woman making an "extraordinary ritual" (59) of trying on hats. Like the woman who needs a hat to hide the truth of her baldness, Sasha is obsessed with clothing because she is acutely aware of the necessity of hiding the truth of the effects of age and drink on her body.

The World of Not Belonging

While the Exhibition site foregrounds the modern, progressive ideology of nation, and ironically illustrates the competition between, hierarchies within, and exclusions from European nationalism, Rhys's novel refuses to make clearly legible the nationality of its characters. The characters Sasha encounters are all displaced

souls who migrate across borders of various sorts, and the text is filled with people from around the world, all of whom are mediated through the protagonist's perceptions. In spite of the thematic importance of place and nation, Sasha declares: "I have . . . no country. I don't belong anywhere" (38). Sasha's assertion that she has no home is the credo of the colonial Creole who articulates the position of all of the outcasts in this novel. As Mary Lou Emery notes, the alienation and estrangement that are such important themes in modernism take on a different nuance when read not just as the crisis of a universalized western subject, but when this condition is recognized to be a product of the modern world. In Rhys's novels the dilemmas her main characters face emanate from "an absence rather than loss of identity and the homelessness of one who never had a home" (Emery 14).

Originally named Sophia, Rhys's protagonist re-names herself Sasha. Her new name, along with the astrakhan coat and Cossack hat she took to wear when she departed London for Paris, obliterate her identity. Besides adopting a new first name, Sasha's last name, being that of the Dutch husband who abandoned her, further obscures her national origin. Like the cendre dye, marriage bleaches away origin. Sasha seems to attract, and is attracted to, people whose national identity is complicated by migration. The novel is concerned not with just revealing the diversity of Paris in the thirties but in depicting characters who are preoccupied with identifying people they encounter, often resulting in misidentifications. Sasha habitually takes notice of the nationality of other patrons at the restaurants and cafés she frequents. She notes the cuisine, too, which is international and becoming more so. A restaurant that "used to be a place where you could only get hot dogs, choucroute,

Vienna steak, Welsh rabbit and things like that. Now, it's more ambitious. 'Spécialités Javanaises'" (38).

All the characters Sasha interacts with in her brief visit are from disputed or colonized territories, and the disjunction between what Sasha assumes upon first sight and what the characters claim as their homeland simultaneously foregrounds the importance and destabilizes the notion of national origins. At the Jardin Marco Polo, where she first notices the Russians, Nicolas Delmar and his companion, Sasha assumes they are German or perhaps Scandinavian. The three "stop under a lamp-post to guess nationalities" (39). Delmar is from the Ukraine, which, following a brief period of independence post-World War I, was under the control of the Soviet Union; 1937 is the year the hammer and sickle were added to the Ukrainian flag, as well as a time of one of Stalin's Great Purges in that region. Sasha thinks René is Spanish or Spanish-American, but he insists he is French-Canadian, an ethnic and linguistic minority of the British Commonwealth. In the Exhibition the Canadian pavilion was literally annexed to that of Great Britain. Sasha speculates that the artist Serge Rubin is Russian, but we never learn for certain his national origin, nor, as Maren Linett notes, do we really know if his first name should be pronounced with a soft g (as if he were French) or a hard g (as if he were Russian). And although Sasha, much to her chagrin, is repeatedly perceived as English, as critics have generally noted, there are several important clues that she is from the West Indies.

Besides emphasizing the importance of national identity, the novel also illustrates how nationality is secured through sexual relations. As an unmarried woman, Sasha's national identity, and thus her very subsistence and existence, is

precarious. The most painful of Sasha's memories are the death of her son and subsequent abandonment by her Dutch husband, Enno Jansen, resulting in a life of poverty and destitution exacerbated by the economic depression Europe experienced in the 1930s. Her brief, if impoverished, romance and marriage with Enno occurred in the post-World War I years. Sasha reflected at that time: "The war is over. No more war–never, never, never. Après la guerre, there'll be a good time everywhere" (96). But instead of a "good time" in the interval of "peace" between the wars, Enno, as his name, phonetically spelling "n-o,"[49] seems to portend, will not provide the way out for Sasha. Chief among Sasha's many failures, and the one that precipitates the departure of her husband, is that she fails to produce a child. Hard up to earn a living during their few years together, the Jansens fail at both economic production and biological reproduction. After the birth of her son Sasha is virtually mummified. The midwife bandages Sasha's abdomen in order to prevent stretch marks, a process that, though intended to preserve her appearance and thus her viability as a sexual commodity, effaces Sasha's role as procreator, and, coupled with the death of the newborn, erases the evidence of her labor. In addition to being unmarried, Sasha is thus also marked as a sexual outsider because she is literally unable to reproduce.

In contrast to the Paris Exhibition, which propounded faith in material progress, in the machine age, Sasha cannot put her faith in historical narratives of progress. Sasha's pain isn't simply the suffering of a mother who survives a dead child or a spouse dealing with abandonment. The ideology of nationalism–a narrative which also excludes Sasha–is another progress narrative which proceeds by exclusion.

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[49] I am indebted to Jane Marcus for this observation.

The others with whom Sasha connects are likewise outside the bourgeois heterosexual economy. Sasha's identifications are with the outcast, the injured, the impoverished, those whose place in the world, and thus their identities, have literally been disrupted: the dishwasher "who does all the dirty work, and gets paid very little for it" (87); the girl with strong legs and hands, hands that "sing the Marseillaise. And when the revolution comes, won't those be the hands to be kissed? Well, so Monsieur Rimbaud says, doesn't he? I hope he's right. I wonder, though, I wonder, I wonder . . . ." (88 ellipses in original); the Hindu clerk who insists Sasha, who intends to buy a "calm book about people with large incomes," buy instead a book of "lurid stories of the white slave-traffic" (111). As Sasha climbs the stairs to the room she and Enno share, she thinks, "I get back to the hotel and climb upstairs to my room. This is a hard thing to do. Has anybody ever had to do this before? Of course, lots of people–poor people. Oh, I see, of course, poor people" (49). She watches an old woman trying on hats and fears, "Watching her, am I watching myself as I shall become? In five years' time, in six years' time, shall I be like that?" (58). Moreover, besides noting the outcasts that surround her in Paris, Sasha is acutely aware how they, like she, are held up for ridicule. When asked by Enno if she would like to "go in and have a look" at café patrons who have paid to be able to sleep rather than drink, she notes that his suggestion sounds "as if he were exhibiting a lot of monkeys" (35).

Sasha's encounter with the Jewish artist Serge Rubin occurs in the middle of the novel and deserves special attention. As Sasha's sympathies cross borders of cultural difference and national identity, so do those of Serge. Two of the episodes from their meeting, Serge's story of his London encounter with a mulatto from

Martinique and his production of African art objects, connect the Jewish character with a diaspora not directly his own. My reading here diverges from critics who have read these scenes as evidence of Serge's own racism and his willingness to engage in primitivist appropriation of another culture, or who read the encounter between Serge and Sasha solely in terms of what it reveals about her, rather than how it fits in with how the novel as a whole reveals the borders and exclusions inherent in European nationalism.

While visiting Serge in his artist's studio, Sasha breaks down in tears. Her despair reminds Serge of an episode in London when he met a mulatto woman from the Caribbean who was "at the end of everything" (80). Defeated by the racist hatred in the eyes of Londoners and the other inhabitants of her boarding house, she remains in London and in an abusive relationship with a white man because she has no place else to go. Serge tries to comfort her, but he also assumes she wants sex from him, to which he fails to respond: "I knew all the time that what she wanted was that I should make love to her and that it was the only thing that would do her any good. But alas, I couldn't" (81). She becomes insulted by his rejection: "When I passed her on the stairs next day I said good morning, but she didn't answer me" (81). Serge's presumption that she wanted sex and his refusal to offer it have been read as indicative of his own racism (Thomas 126-7). His presumption seems to signal a racist stereotype since "in Paris during the 1930s blacks represented sexual expression untrammeled by the repressive conventions of European society" (Gilman 120). However, what critics have not yet considered is if his aversion to female sexuality is just that, an aversion to female sexuality, and as such should be read as

evidence of Serge's homosexuality.[50] Since male Jews in this period were read as effeminate or homosexual (Gilman 119; Boyarin 72), Serge's story of the encounter is more complex than has thus far been suggested. He says further of the episode:

> There were two other women in the house. . . . I must say I never heard them speaking to the Martiniquaise, but they had cruel eyes, both of them. . . . I didn't much like the way they looked at me, either . . . . (81)

The novel thematically stresses the importance of exhibitions and appearances, of looking and displaying, of belonging and excluding. Sasha is constantly anxious and aware of being seen as an outsider, a foreigner, an old woman, a rich woman. In the scene above, it's narratively unclear what the other boarders see when they look at Serge–A Jew? A homosexual? Both? What is clear is that like Sasha and like the Martinican he knows he's being defined and excluded. The other boarders look at him, too; he, too, is one to whom "it is safe to be cruel" (81).

Trying to read Serge leads us into the confused, but politically potent, racist rhetorics of difference that construct (and often conflate) Jews and blacks in Europe in the 20s and 30s. A common construction was to elide difference and see the two groups as interchangeable (Gilman 31; Gilroy 211-12). Georges Montandon, chair of ethnology of the Ecole d'Anthropologie employs this racist conflation when he refers to Léon Blum, France's first Jewish Prime Minister, as a "Nigger of the Nile" (Lebovics 42). Further complicating representations, both anti-black and anti-Semitic

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[50] In that regard, this scene echoes Sasha's recollection of the last tutoring session she had with another Russian man, who wants to read all the works of Oscar Wilde, frowns "when he says the word 'femme'" (115), and seems to fear that Sasha wants him sexually.

stereotypes are constructed through sexual categories that are mutually exclusive. While Serge perhaps could be read as a "white Negro" in certain contexts, he cannot be white in relation to other characters. When he tells Sasha that when he was in London he "looked quite an Englishman from the neck down" (79), he marks the limits of where performing whiteness can take him. Sasha herself, in her first description of Serge, immediately stereotypes his unmistakable Jewishness: "He has that mocking look of the Jew, the look that can be so hateful, that can be so attractive, that can be so sad" (76).

When Serge attempts to lift Sasha's spirits he plays Caribbean music, a West Indian folksong, *Maladie d'amour,* and dances for her while he dons one of the "West African" masks he has made. Serge's display takes on multiple levels of significance. Being a displaced Jew, his performance indicates not so much western appropriation of African culture, but cultural reference to commonality. The sympathetic bond shared by Jew and African is repeated in the painting which Sasha buys depicting "an old Jew with a red nose, playing a banjo" (83).[51] This picture is significant to the novel not just because it reflects Sasha's own "marginalized state" (Sternlicht 91), but because it is culturally syncretic; it depicts one diasporic culture using the instrument of another to express itself.

The most frequently quoted line of the novel is Sasha's assertion: "I have no pride—no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere" (38). In

[51] Serge was modeled on the Belorus-born painter Simon Segal, whom Rhys met in Paris. She brought from him a painting "Old Man with a Banjo," which she ripped up in a fit of drunken despair over writing the conclusion of the novel (*Letters* 137).

response to the question of what binds diasporic Africans together, Ralph Ellison refers to what he calls "an identity of passions . . . a share[d] . . . hatred for the alienation forced upon us by Europeans during the process of colonization and empire." He concludes, "We are bound by our common suffering more than by our pigmentation" (255). More recently Brent Edwards has asserted the usefulness of Ellison's concept because

> it forces us to take up whatever 'diaspora' might mean in a context shaped by European imperialism and racist exploitation. It also forces us to take up the issue in a frame of what Earl Lewis calls 'overlapping diasporas'– reminding us that peoples of African descent are not the only peoples who have been scattered by those forces. (796)

In contrast to the world that Sasha experiences walking around Paris, one full of hateful stares and hurtful gossip, or the world of the Exhibition, which Sasha spends the whole novel avoiding, what the world of Serge's studio offers is a culturally syncretic diasporic world; exiled Jew and white Caribbean who don't have a home in the metropole can cry and dance together. Besides providing Sasha with the only friendship she forms while in Paris, the episode with Serge affords Sasha her only peaceful reverie–a memory that stands out from the rest because it's the only one in the novel that does not bring pain. While Serge plays Martinique béguine music on his gramophone, Sasha recalls "lying in a hammock" in a place located between hills and the sea. As a number of critics have noted, the music identifies Sasha as a Creole with a past, if not an origin, in the Caribbean (e.g., Savory 117; Sternlicht 91).

Furthermore, I want to consider reading Serge's imitation of native African art as destabilizing claims to authenticity. The discourse of native and authentic–a discourse on abundant display in the colonial pavilions where imported "native" artisans crafted objects sold for the profit of the Exposition–is often used to undergird essentialist notions of identity, notions that in contexts more invidious than Exposition souvenir shops or museum vitrines would be used to identify, isolate, and, in violence more material than epistemic, obliterate difference. Discourses on race resorted to essentialist constructions while also linking outcast and degenerate categories. By claiming to create "authentic African art," Serge invalidates the "myth of black difference" (Gilman 125) that underlies much of modernist primitivism.

The numerous songs that punctuate the novel and articulate Sasha's thoughts are in contrast to the cold, inhuman mechanical production promised by the futuristic Exhibition. Instead of providing a means of self-expression, the world promised by the Exhibition makes Sasha "feel like an automaton." In contrast, when Serge shakes her hand, she notes: "The touch of the human hand. . . . I'd forgotten what it was like, the touch of the human hand . . . . Then he gives my hand a long hard shake and says 'Amis.' When he shakes my hand like that and says 'Amis' I feel very happy" (84, first set of ellipses in original). This is the only acknowledgment of friendship in the novel and one of the few times the troubled protagonist claims to feel happy. Serge's simple handshake is also in sharp contrast to other mentions of hands and limbs in the novel, the artificial limbs Sasha sees in a London shop, and especially the mechanical hand in the nightmare that points her to the Exhibition.

Conclusion: No Way Out

Setting her novel against the backdrop of the Paris 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques Appliqués à la Vie Moderne enables Rhys to draw attention to the complex cultural conflicts that the Exhibition staged. As art historians have noted, the emphatic nationalism of that exhibit, in spite of its attempt at forecasting a hopeful future, calls attention instead to an impending repetition of a recent violent past. Reading the repetitions, and the myriad meanings embedded in them, helps explain the fatalistic logic behind *Good Morning, Midnight's* final linguistic paradox: Sasha's yeses.

Although the encounter with Serge provides Sasha a respite from the world outside his studio, it is with René that Sasha finally attends the Exhibition and it is he who leads Sasha to confront the nightmare she's been avoiding. The novel's conclusion refers back to the beginning, and structurally the plot doesn't just move Sasha forward in time as she has her various encounters, but leads her, and the novel's readers, to confront her past. As the title–good morning, midnight–indicates, greeting the future often entails facing darkness. Rhys structures the plot in such a way as to make history itself an important theme of the novel. As Jean Radford notes, "One of the ways in which history is written into [1930s modernist] texts is by refusing to totalise, by posing the narrativisation of the past as a problem, so that the reader, like the participant in history, must piece together his or her own fragmentary and contradictory grasp of events. . . . [T]he characters' struggles to make sense of their memories stage questions of history and historicism as urgently, if differently, as any realist novel of the period" (36).

After visiting the Exhibition, René and Sasha end up in her room, where she allows herself to be seduced by him. She changes her mind, resists, and, after a violent struggle, René leaves. The scene that ends the novel has led critics to propose remarkably divergent interpretations of Sasha's final actions. Wanting René to return to her, Sasha opens her door slightly, undresses, and hopes for his return. Instead of René, the man in the room next to hers, having overheard the aborted encounter between René and Sasha, enters. The novel ends as Sasha, realizing that the man in her room is the commis she has studiously and fearfully avoided and who gives her a "nightmare feeling" (31), says "yes – yes - yes" to his advances (159).

Various critics have noted the allusion to *Ulysses* in Rhys's ending (e.g., Savory 131; Howells 103) while the echoes of Molly Bloom do ring through the concluding words of the novel, Sasha's affirmation is not the orgasmic and life-affirming cry of the autoerotic and decidedly un-chaste Penelope. Desiring stasis from the start, Sasha has discovered that she can neither stop time nor avoid her past. Like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, Sasha is swept forward while facing an inescapable past. Overwhelmed by the accretion of that past, her surrender to the commis voyageur is a futile attempt to prevent herself from being swept along any further in a plot not of her making. By the end of her narrative Sasha can no longer distinguish temporal differences: "You are walking along a road peacefully. You trip. You fall into blackness. That's the past–or perhaps the future. And you know that there is no past, no future, there is only this blackness, changing faintly, slowly, but always the same" (144). Anticipating sex with René, Sasha thinks she has managed to be in a place outside of time, to achieve the stasis she's wanted from the beginning

of the novel: “No past to make us sentimental, no future to embarrass us” (149). She engages in pre-sexual rituals “as slowly as possible.” Wanting René to be patient, Sasha’s interior monologue is inundated with repetition and delay : “Time, time, give me time–wait a minute, wait a minute, not yet . . .” (149, ellipses in original). But in spite of her efforts, the scene moves forward. The clock, as Sasha notes several times, “keeps ticking.” Sasha wants to get René back because of the brief hope the encounter offered for stopping time. As she herself imagines chasing after him, she thinks, “It isn’t too late, it isn’t too late. For the last time, for the last time” (157).

With René gone, “all that is left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable flexible arms, made of white steel. Long, thin arms” (156). This vision recalls the nightmare from the beginning of the novel which Sasha had upon first arriving in Paris. In that nightmare a man with a hand “made out of steel” (12) points her to the Exhibition instead of the way out she desires. Choosing to attend the Exhibition with René, Sasha, whose painful memories have all been dredged up by this point, acknowledges that there is no way to avoid the past. As a way to avoid the future, Sasha surrenders to the commis. As the novel’s final, futile repetition, Sasha succumbs in a last effort to “despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time. For the last time . . .” (159, ellipses in original).

Part II: Burning Down the House

> The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world . . . that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters.
>
> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Djuna Barnes's Robin avoids stasis in order to avoid being defined by the images others have of her. Jean Rhys's Sasha, in contrast, desires stasis—understood in *Good Morning, Midnight* as a way to avoid being swept away by the inevitable future, the coming of war, the repetition of a past—personal and political—she can't avoid. For Rhys, Paris in 1937 represented the all subsuming nationalism which heralded the coming of World War Two, leaving no place for an outsider to be. Not insignificantly, Rhys is most able to challenge the empire—and its literary tradition—when she sets her work not in the metropole, but when she provides a pre-history to a canonical text by setting it in the so-called New World. While the "New World" is for Barnes is a pre-historic, primitive space outside confines of western civilization, for Rhys it's a place she can revise literary history and inscribe her own narrative of rebellion.

Although *Wide Sargasso Sea* was the last novel Rhys wrote and was not published until 1966, by 1945 she claims that the novel is "half finished."[52] Although

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[52] Per Rhys's letter to Peggy Kirkaldy, "I have a novel half finished. I should like to finish it – partly because Leslie [Tilden-Smith, her second husband] liked it, partly

it is unclear exactly what year she began the novel, it's perhaps significant that Rhys's final two novels, *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Wide Sargasso Sea,* were written after she made what seems to be her only return to the West Indies since leaving her birthplace at age 17, when she visited Dominica for three weeks in 1936. *Wide Sargasso Sea* does battle directly with the tradition—and an issue that was personally contentious for Rhys, the representation of the "madwoman" Bertha in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*—and also subverts the tradition by displacing the source of the key action.

There has been abundant critical attention given to comparative feminist readings of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Since the mid-1980s, critics have especially looked at these two texts from a post-colonial perspective, considering the historical and political positions of the two protagonists, one emphatically English, the other a white Creole, and the politics of representation.[53] Elizabeth Baer, in particular, thoroughly explicates how fully Rhys connected her work to Bronte's. However, even Baer's careful reading seems to underestimate the significance of what to me is the central incident of Rhys's novel: the burning of Coulibri, the colonial plantation that is set on fire by the former slaves at the end of the first section and recalled by Antoinette (now Bertha) as she plunges to her death at the end of the final section of Bronte's novel. Although the story told in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is

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because I think it might be the one book I've written that's much use" (*Letters* 39). Also, there are large portions of the novel in Rhys's erratic handwriting in the British Library which seem to date from the early 1940s.

[53] See Mary Lou Emery, *Jean Rhys at World's End: Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile*; and Veronica Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole.*

antecedent to *Jane Eyre*, the two narratives come together as this event is repeated, with significant difference, at the conclusion of Rhys's novel.

The conclusion of *Jane Eyre* has been interpreted in radically different ways, depending on the scholar's critical perspective. "Reader, I married him" can be read as a triumph of the heterosexual romance plot and the simultaneous completion of the journey of moral development that is an essential part of the bildungsroman: after years of confinement, deprivation, self-control and self-denial (most notably in her refusal to serve as Rochester's mistress after the truth of his married state is revealed), Jane finally gains the middle-class status that has eluded her throughout the novel. In addition, the male hero, who immediately fell off his horse when he first entered the scene, by novel's end also has completed his quest—he has his property and the good girl—and the two (plus their infant son, of course) can now presumably live out a life of domestic tranquility.

In *Power/Knowledge*, Michel Foucault describes the "central moment in the history of repression [as] . . . the moment where it became understood that it was more efficient and profitable to place people under surveillance than to subject them to some exemplary penalty" (38-9). Using Foucault's repressive model of surveillance as a basis for his own narrative theory, D.A. Miller in *The Novel and the Police* speculates on "the possibility of a radical *entanglement* between the nature of the novel and the practice of the police" (2). That is Miller describes, how the novel, as discourse, is part of the synaptic regime of surveillance described by Foucault. Miller theorizes that the plot of the novel of development, for example, although it

may ostensibly aim to free its protagonist from social repression, invariably reinscribes the hierarchic binary of liberal and carceral subjects.

For a bildungsroman to begin, as *Jane Eyre* does, by revealing the outcast status of its hero is a common trope. The traditional bildungsroman then follows such heroes as they claim their rightful place in society which false representatives of the moral law seek to deny; it is the quest of the hero of such plots to enter into a valid and respectable subjectivity. Miller writes specifically about *Oliver Twist* and how its plot ultimately reveals that the injustice Oliver suffers is a result of his being denied the privileges entitled him because of his lineage (59). When the truth about his identity is learned, he is reinscribed as a middle-class citizen, free in the end to leave the lower-class world of crime and poverty. His abject status, therefore, is largely attributable to mistaken identity, and his search for identity is not a psychological transformation but rather the recovery of a lost origin. When the real self is found, he can then be a property-owning truly "English" subject.

It is more than mere coincidence that Jane's proper subjectivity is similarly established at novel's end. She not only triumphs morally and is thus rewarded by marriage, but the inheritance and family connection that has eluded her throughout the novel secures her as a viable Victorian heroine. Rochester recognizes her as the good English girl, in contrast to the Italian, German, and French women he previously consorted with, and especially in contrast to the primitive West Indian woman he was forced to marry. As Miller reveals, in such novels the police and their supplements are often dupes—such as Aunt Reed and Brocklehurst—who prevent justice; but the policing function of the Novel itself is to describe the more pervasive because

invisible social control of which the novel itself is just one part. For Miller, the teleology of the Novel is ultimately into a world of middle-class respectability, whose ending affirms happiness in marriage and monetary success, but especially that our protagonists are now "English." In contrast to the trans-modernist fiction of Woolf, Barnes, and Rhys, which emphasize and maintain the outsider position of its main characters, the goal of the protagonist of the traditional bildungsroman, like the typical romance plot, is to no longer be the outsider.

Early feminist criticism (most notably the work of Gilbert and Gubar) reads the plot of *Jane Eyre* as a defeat of one type of woman, the "madwoman" in favor of another. Postcolonial critics add further nuance to this reading by emphasizing that the plot not only pits one woman against the other, but also validates the western subject over the Other. In Gayatri Spivak's analysis, for example, western feminism is complicit with imperialism; if the role of what Edward Said has called the "literature of empire" is to legitimate the western subject, Bronte's novel achieves this by denying subjectivity to Bertha. But while Rhys's novel has opened up significant critical space, especially by enabling readers to re-read *Jane Eyre* and its conclusion not as the act of a madwoman but as a deliberate act of vengeance by a woman whose dehumanization was a result of her mistreatment at the hands of her English husband, Rhys's novel, too, has become a problematic, if essential text for both postcolonial and feminist critics.[54]

As Benita Parry notes, when Jean Rhys's novel moves to England—when the short final section of her novel re-narrates the dramatic conclusion of *Jane Eyre*, her

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[54] For a full discussion of this, see Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Parry, and Ingram.

novel's most subversive character, the Martinican servant who has looked after Antoinette, Christophine, must leave the narrative (39). After her challenge to Rochester, "She walk[s] away, without looking back" (133). As Moira Ferguson notes, in spite of Christophine's absence in the rest of the text, "the register of subaltern voices resonates" (112). Christophine departs from the novel not as failure, but because she will not directly participate in the novel's necessary conclusion.

I would argue that the character of Christophine and her departure can be read more positively than Spivak—who interprets it as Rhys's forced silencing of the upstart subaltern— will allow. For a subaltern who cannot speak, she in fact says quite a lot. Christophine's speaking back to Rochester reveals the crucial power and especially property issues that are vital elements of both novels. Rochester's attempts to discredit her are revealed to be his futile attempt at gaining power over his prime possession—his wife. Rhys's narrative alters the context for understanding the romance plot between Jane and Edward. The mysterious, sexually powerful male is deflated in Rhys's novel when she re-writes his erotics as a desire for power. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, he marries Antoinette for her money, and when he fears he's not contained her sexually, he commits adultery with a black servant girl. He then transports his new wife to an alien country and locks her up in the attic. Rhys demystifies Rochester's strength when she reveals its source: control of Antoinette's inheritance and her body, which are reinforced by the prevailing colonialist laws. Rochester and English law can't navigate the ways of the West Indies any more than he can know the truth about her sexual past or fully control her body. After he hears a rumor of his new wife's alleged promiscuity, he follows a paved road only to be lost

in the natural vegetation of Jamaica. Rhys places him in the prototypical narrative of European territorial colonial conquest in the New World, in which the iconographically figured female[55] is supposed to bend to his will. In spite of his desires and the powers given to him by the law, this newly constructed 'Rochester' can only contain his wife by leaving the island setting and returning to the narrative space of *Jane Eyre*.

In her last conversation with Rochester, Christophine questions whether England really exists:

> "England," said Christophine, who was watching me. "You think there is such a place?"
>
> "How can you ask that? You know there is."
>
> "I never see the damn place, how I know?"
>
> "You do not believe that there is a country called England?" . . .
>
> "I don't say I don't *believe,* I say I don't *know.* I know what I see with my eyes and I never see it." (92)

As Ferguson notes, *Wide Sargasso Sea* "overtly represents renegotiated colonial relations between the colonizer and freed but still colonized" (91). In the passage above, Rhys has an illiterate black woman articulate the limits of western empiricism. In the third and last part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys alludes to the

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[55] This iconography is discussed in various works, including Louis Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery;" Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*; and more recently, the Caribbean scholar Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo*: *Modernism and Caribbean Literature*.

physical book *Jane Eyre* when Bertha leaves her attic prison and enters a world of "cardboard."[56] Antoinette wants to "see what is behind the cardboard" (180), to penetrate the veneer of beliefs—about race, about women, and about sexuality—that legitimate the plot of the canonical English text.

[56] See Ellen G. Friedman, "Breaking the Master Narrative: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" for a thorough interpretation of Rhys's reference to the literal book at the conclusion of her novel.

Chapter 4 -- Claude McKay's Quest for a Queer Nation

Part I: McKay's Diasporic Plots and Politics

I read the novels of the Jamaican-born colonial exile Claude McKay as a tetralogy framed by an epic quest for home. McKay's novels--the three published works, *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo*, and *Banana Bottom*, as well as the yet unpublished *Romance in Marseilles*[57]--reveal a western colonialism which relies on the fiction of a homeland for diasporic Africans. Moreover, McKay's protagonists, as they navigate their way towards a mythic home, set out on adventurous sexual explorations that reject normative sexuality. I read McKay's novels as the work of a bi-sexual transnational intellectual, who in his fiction simultaneously explores and unsettles normative assumptions about sexuality, and contests the boundaries of the modern nation.

McKay was born in 1889 in Clarendon Parish, Jamaica, and died in 1948 in Chicago; his prolific writing, which encompassed a variety of genres, illustrates the range and depth of his intellectual and political engagement. He wrote poetry (in Jamaican dialect as well as 'standard' English verse); short stories; the four novels mentioned above; two memoirs; two studies of race in the United States, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (a collection of editorials and short newspaper pieces) and a volume called *Negroes in America*.[58] As the son of Jamaican peasants whose emigration was necessitated by the racial and class hierarchies that limited his upward

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[57] The novel is available in England from University of Exeter Press, but it has yet to be published in the U.S. or picked up by an American distributor. The manuscript is available at the Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture.

[58] This is McKay's address to the 4th Comitern was originally published in Russian and has since been translated back into English. The original text is extant.

mobility,[59] McKay throughout his life was intensely class- and race-conscious. He worked for Sylvia Pankhurst's *Workers' Dreadnought*, the London *Daily Mail*, was associate editor of the *Liberator*, was probably a member of the Communist Party, and while in Russia in 1922-23 he addressed the Fourth Soviet Comintern of the Third Communist International.

A deracinated black world citizen, between his departure from Jamaica in 1912 and his death in Chicago in 1948, McKay traveled in the American south (and briefly attended Tuskegee Institute) and the mid-west (he also attended Kansas State University); he resided in Harlem, London, Paris, Soviet Russia, Morocco, Tangier, Harlem again, and finally, Chicago. He never returned to Jamaica. Although he became an American citizen in 1940, at age 51, he was, for most of his life, a rather unsettled subject of the British Empire.

Critically McKay is often referred to as a writer of the Harlem Renaissance, and, more recently, his work has been placed in an alternate black modernist tradition, African-American or Caribbean. Though well-established as a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance, at least since Lilian Kesteloot published her study of "Negro-African" literature in French, *Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une litérature* (1963), McKay has also been acknowledged as one of the founders of the Négritude movement. In more recent studies such as James Arnold's *Modernism and Negritude* (1981) and Simon Gikandi's *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (1992), scholars have not been content to simply map out a separate genealogy of diasporic literature. Rather, as Arnold's and Gikandi's titles

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[59] See Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia* (38-40).

suggest, scholars have begun to read these traditions under the ever-expanding and contested definitional boundaries of "modernism."[60] My own reading of McKay's life and work is especially indebted to recent studies that place McKay in the tradition(s) of radical transnational intellectual queer Marxist West Indian writers and thinkers, including work by Brent Edwards, John Lowney, Josh Gosciak, Michelle Stephens, Winston James, William Maxwell, Heather Hathaway, and, most recently, Gary Holcomb.[61]

Besides the uncertainty about which critical tradition one should place McKay's work into, the theme of "home" preoccupied McKay in many of his writings, from his first novel, *Home to Harlem* (1923), to his memoir of his adult years, *A Long Way from Home* (1937), to the autobiographical memoir of his youth written towards the end of his life, *My Green Hills of Jamaica* (pub. 1975). Biographer Wayne Cooper sub-titled his study of McKay's life, *Rebel Sojourner of the Harlem Renaissance*. McKay refers to himself in various places as a perennial "vagabond," and in his letters to his agent, William Bradley, he not infrequently claims he simply wants to find a place to live that's comfortable (or at times just not

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[60] Leopold Senghor considered McKay the "spiritual father of Negritude" (qtd in Arnold's *Modernism and Negritude* 28). And Aimé Césaire referred to McKay as the first Caribbean novelist.

[61] See *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Edwards); "Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of *Home to Harlem*" (Lowney, 2000); *The Shadowed Country* (Gosciak 2006); "Black Transnationalism and the Politics of National Identity: West Indian Intellectuals in Harlem in the Age of War and Revolution" (Stephens, 1998), "A Race Outcast from an Outcast Class: Claude McKay's Experience and Analysis of Britain" (James, 2003); *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars* (Maxwell, 1999); *Caribbean Waves: Relocating Claude McKay and Paule Marshall* (Hathaway, 1999) and *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Holcomb, 2007).

too uncomfortable), but he also writes to Bradley that he has been "vagabonding away from marriage all [his] life," and he declares in his memoir that he is fundamentally "undomesticated in the blood." In his poem "Outcast," McKay asserts that his fundamental homelessness--and the impulse to write about it--is not a response to the chaos of the modern world in a period of increased mechanization and urbanization, but rather a fundamental aspect of modernity as experienced by those subjected to western imperialism and colonialism:

> For I was born, far from my native clime
> Under the white man's menace, out of time.

I would further argue that "homelessness" is not just indicative of his experience as a diasporic African, but is also reflected in his comments on romance and domesticity and in his representations of sexuality, especially in his novels. In his literary endeavors, McKay turns the quest for home—a rather old and standard narrative, both as the goal of a male quest and the female romance—into some rather queer tales. What this chapter explores is how McKay queers the quest for a national home.

Claude McKay's first two novels, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, are picaresques about diasporic black characters whose place in the world—problematic to begin with in the modern world of racially defined nation-states—is further disrupted by World War One, a war of western imperialism that conscripted blacks from various parts of the world.[62] Although the title *Home to Harlem* evokes the quest plot, its main

[62] There is an irony here that was quite apparent to McKay: that if the fifteenth and sixteenth voyages erased the history and elided the subjectivity of Africans and non-western natives, the first World War, by bringing black populations from various

character is an African American war deserter who develops a cross-cultural friendship with a Haitian intellectual, Ray. The protagonist, Jake's "quest" for home becomes sidetracked as he searches for a prostitute he slept with his first night back in New York. Jake's search for Harlem becomes a search for a woman, Felice (and notably not one who would typically be thought of as a worthy object of a romantic quest); by the novel's conclusion, Jake is in Chicago. The strangeness of the outline of his plot is reflective of the way McKay repeatedly employs and then undermines conventions. Hazel Carby harshly critiques what she perceives as McKay's stereotyped depictions of women, but I would instead emphasize the subversive reversals in McKay's plot. As a black man, Jake won't be a hero in a European war that is about defending or extending borders. At the conclusion, he also rejects the home that he once desired and that for a while Harlem seemed to provide. In this novel McKay is beginning to develop ideas of a black diasporic identity, as he maps out a differently bordered 'nation' in the friendship that develops between Jake and Ray.[63]

His second novel, *Banjo*, as the sub-title, a "novel without a plot" indicates, is not about the movement of characters. The book is not a narrative of development and progress, but a pointedly plotless dialogic novel about a group of diasporic Africans finding identity and forging community in the international port of Marseilles, post-World War I. The objective of the narrative is to illuminate what

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parts of the diaspora together, helped set the stage for the rise of pan-Africanism and black nationalist movements.

[63] See John Lowney's "Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of *Home to Harlem*" for a full discussion of the role of this transnational friendship in the novel.

Brent Edwards refers to as the "vagabond internationalism" of the blacks for whom the port, a place of perpetual traffic and movement, is 'home.' That is, the home the diverse group of characters find there is not located in the place, but in the transnational community of men, as Edwards puts it, "a global community of the dispossessed" (199) who reject their places of birth – including the United States, Senegal, Haiti, the West Indies, India, Poland, Italy, Malta.

In his novels, McKay grounds the common modernist themes of exile and deracination in a racial and political context, as his black characters, war heroes and deserters, artists and vagabonds, intellectuals and "primitives," struggle against the European definition of nation. While all of McKay's novels address the quest for home, the "home" his protagonists desire is better defined as a non-bordered "connection and collaboration among people's of African descent," Edwards' definition of diaspora ("Uses of Diaspora" 47). While that formulation might seem to validate a transnational black nationalism as an alternative to the nation-states of the modern world, I would suggest that the queerness of McKay's novels argues against replacing one form of nationalism with another, even if that other is unbounded by geography. In *Banjo*, for example, one of the things that is notable about the community in the red light district the novel foregrounds is that the group includes diasporic and native Africans as well as white Europeans, such as Italians, Finns, and Slavs.

Moreover, when McKay celebrates black transnational community, it is not being black per se, but being part of a black diasporic community that McKay (through his characters) celebrates. McKay's Black Nationalism would inherently be

transnationalist. In *Home to Harlem* Jake experiences something of an epiphany after Ray tells him of the Haitian Revolution:

> Jake felt like one passing through a dream, vivid in rich, varied colors. It was a revelation beautiful in his mind. That brief account of an island of savage black people, who fought for collective liberty and was struggling to create a culture of their own. A romance of his race, just down there by Panama. How strange!
>
> Jake was American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt of poor foreigners. As an American Negro he looked askew at foreign niggers, cannibals. And West Indians were monkey-chasers. But now he felt like a boy who stands with the map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonders of the world. (153)

The "romance of his race" Jake experiences is a crucial moment in the story of his journey "home." Standing like a boy in front of a new map of the world, Jake's national quest becomes a transnational one. What he sees in this new map is a vision of diverse blackness, a world that allows identifications across national lines, in the name of blackness.

Romance in Marseilles

Romance in Marseilles focuses on another black hero, Lafala, questing to return home to Africa. While working on the novel, McKay informed his agent, William Bradley that he wanted it to be an alternative to the picaresque form he had

used in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* (Letters, October 28, 1930). In contrast to the more uncertain teleology of *Home to Harlem* and the "plotless" *Banjo*, *Romance in Marseilles* is a quest novel, though one that seems defeated from the start. Moreover, the novel, as the title suggests, is a romance, and the tension of the novel builds in the final section when it seems that the romantic pursuit may thwart the success of the quest, when it seems uncertain that the hero can fulfill erotic desire and also successfully return home.

Originally from the African bush, Lafala was educated by missionaries, thus from his youth Africa was not really the "pure" black homeland he is nostalgic for. He left school to be a sailor, and consequently lived port to port. After World War One Lafala wants to go back to Africa, and dreams of a return home in order to "find salvation in native things" (3). He believes he can 'return' through a woman he meets in Marseilles, Aslima. She, in his mind, is a near-native, a woman of mixed African and Arab blood, and the novel suggests the possibility of other influences, too, which make her a "barbaric creature" (3), that is, for Lafala, someone who is emphatically not the product of European civilization. However, she disappoints his idealized view by stealing from him, and then abandoning him, prompting the despairing Lafala to leave Marseilles on board a ship bound for Africa as a stowaway to escape his "frustrated feelings and dark desire" (3).

The reader gets all this information in retrospect. In the opening scene of *Romance in Marseilles*, the protagonist, Lafala, is in bed. A major impediment to his potential progress is apparent from the start because this hero has no legs. His legs frozen, and consequently amputated as a result of stowing away on board a ship

bound from Marseilles for his native Africa, he awakens in the United States, New York City, specifically, and finds himself in a "strange land, without home" friends or feet (5).

Humiliated by Aslima's mistreatment of him, Lafala had decided to stow away on an American ship crossing the Atlantic. As Simon Gikandi notes, the specter of the Middle Passage hovers over Caribbean writers, and the symbolism in these details would seem extraordinarily heavy-handed, were it not for the fact that the story is based on a true event that McKay not only knew about, but intervened on the victim's behalf.[64] Thus this quest story begins when the African protagonist, who wants nothing but his freedom and self-determination, is found "trespassing" on a capitalist shipping vessel, and is locked away in inhuman conditions. He says "they didn't even think it was necessary to let me out to take air" (9). On his way to the New World, our hero is constrained in a toilet, freezes, and is damaged for life in a way that will forever limit his freedom of movement.

This initial voyage itself is not directly narrated; rather the story is told about him by the objective narrator and it establishes an important context for understanding Lafala's desires for his homeland. "It was a time of universal excitement after the war and even among Negroes there were signs of a stirring and

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[64] McKay wrote to his agent, William Bradley, on February 10, 1928: "The fellow out of whom I was creating Taloufa got back here in January with both his legs cut off below the knees. He had stowed away on a Fabre boat to New York towards the end of '26, and was locked up in W .C. where his feet were frozen. The doctors cut them off at Ellis Island and one of those Jewish accident lawyers sued the Fabre company for the boy and obtained a settlement of 17,000 dollars of which the boy got twelve thousand. The British Consul in New York sent 10,000 dollars for him to Niger and he was repatriated by way of Marseille. But then on the day of sailing for West Africa, the Company Fabre had him arrested for clandestine embarkation and he was thrown into prison. We got him out two weeks ago and he is gone home" (Letters).

from the New World a dark cry of Back to Africa came over the air" (3). In the port city,

> Lafala heard the other Negroes discussing the Back-to-Africa news and wondering what would become of it. Lafala listened and was stirred too. Return…Return… Turn away from strange scenes and false gods to find salvation in native things…. (3, ellipses in original).

But the result of his heeding the call "home" is that, as the novel begins, he is even further from his homeland than he was at the beginning of his tale. With the help of another patient in the hospital ward, a savvy and cynical Afro-American, whom Lafala dubs the 'Black Angel,' Lafala is given the idea of suing the shipping company. The Jewish lawyer secured to advance Lafala's cause characterizes his case as that of a "poor African boy without any relatives taken away from his people when he was so young he did not even remember them, without family, without country, even without legs" (13). The characterization of the Jewish lawyer here is reminiscent of Rhys's contradictory rendering of Serge in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Though McKay, in his later nonfiction writings, insists there is no anti-Semitism in Harlem, the terms lawyer, Jew, and ambulance chaser are sometimes used interchangeably.

As with Rhys's representation of Serge, besides illustrating, however inadvertently, the easygoing stereotyping of Jews in 1930s literature on either side of the Atlantic, McKay is also at pains to connect the homelessness of the black and Jewish characters. While in the hospital Lafala weaves a girdle--a garment he recalls worn by the tribeswomen of his youth—as a sentimental way to pass the time. When he gives the girdle to the lawyer as a gift the man states that, "[The girdle] carried me

back to very ancient times. I mean the times when my people were also divided into tribes and wore girdles just as your people do today" (16).[65]

While awaiting the court's decision, Black Angel, apparently in league with the lawyer, takes Lafala to Harlem. There he becomes an item of much interest to those aware of the money he stands to make off his misfortune. At a party Black Angel throws for him, Lafala, now fitted with cork legs, is urged to dance. As the Black Angel tells him, "Ef you kain't dance on the floor, you can dance in the bed" (21). That is, although he can't succeed in a male quest, can't determine his forward movement, Lafala can at least be part of an erotic plot. Nonetheless, he is an attraction as much for his winning personality as the rumor of a large sum due him from the shipping company. His homeward quest becomes sidetracked and necessitated (enabled) by the pursuit of his cash award, money he will need to return to west Africa and establish himself there.

While in Harlem, his story is so big in the black papers that Lafala upstages the presence of a more notable figure, "the pretender to the throne of Africa and his titled entourage," a barely disguised reference to Marcus Garvey (24). Many people and organizations appeal to Lafala for financial help, including an oxymoronically named organization called the Christian Unity of Negro Tribes. McKay's satirical rendering of the organization is apparent from its acronym, C.U.N.T. With these

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[65] As Winston James notes (165), it was the anti-racist positions--the protections it afforded to racial and ethnic minorities--of the Bolsheviks, most notably their efforts toward "stamping out anti-semitism" [sic], that helped win black support for the Bolshevik Revolution. As McKay wrote in the *Negro World* in 1921, "Bolshevism has made Russia safe for the Jew. It has liberated the Slav peasant from priest and bureaucrat who can no longer egg him on to murder Jews to bolster up their rotten institutions. It might make these United States safe for the Negro" (qtd in James 165).

details, McKay is not merely critiquing the pretensions of the Harlem upper class or Garvey's peculiar pomposity, but also challenging the mythmaking of race organizations. Furthermore, Garvey is of course also trying to raise cash for a return to Africa, through a self-aggrandizing claim to the trappings of western monarchy and hierarchical political organization.[66]

Although Lafala accepts news of the legal settlement "with a primitive dignity that appeared like indifference" (23) and is excited about the prosthetic legs – which he refers to as 'corks'-- paid for by the company, his time spent in Harlem and his adventures there have changed and 'modernized' him. Moreover, just as the incident itself—the attempt to return home, the injury caused on the voyage, his incapacitation—foreground Lafala's placelessness and lack of agency, the dispensation of the award is further made problematic because of Lafala's uncertain citizenship. To claim his award, Lafala needs to be represented by a government official. But he is not a citizen of either of the two free states in Africa, Liberia and

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[66] Garvey's place in the history of the Harlem Renaissance and the rise of Black Nationalism of course has been re-evaluated of late (see Stephens, for example). Nonetheless, as he is parodied in this text he is a figure of derision, and I would argue that representation is further evidence of McKay's anti-essentialism and his resistance to plots which re-instate borders. McKay's essay on Garvey in *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* paints a complex portrait of a vital, if somewhat dangerous and yet admirable man: "This peacock-parading Negro of the New World, hoodooed by the 'Negromancy' of Africa, followed a star—a Black Star. A weaver of dreams, he translated into a fantastic pattern of reality the gaudy strands of the vicarious desires of the submerged members of the Negro race" (143).

Ethiopia. Instead: "He belonged to one of the parceled regions and was therefore either a colonial subject or a protected person" (26).[67]

At the company's expense, Lafala is finally able to return, not to his African home, but to Marseilles. The effect of all this partying in New York has been to further diminish Lafala's strength. On his voyage back to Marseilles, Lafala is seasick, and as a result ends up spending his second transatlantic voyage also in the water closet.

The second section of the novel develops the romance plot. Although he was abandoned by her before, Lafala wants to see Aslima again. McKay initially names the setting Dreamport in hopes of distinguishing this novel from *Banjo*. As in *Banjo*, the port city of Marseilles signifies for McKay a space of sexual freedom, adventure, and community in a multiracial, international port—and a space to narratively and dialogically explore the meaning of race, home, and nation. However, this novel is quite distinct from the overwhelmingly homosocial and dialogic *Banjo*. The action in the second, and especially in the third and last section is dramatic, even melodramatic, and as McKay notes, he is particularly interested in setting up suspense.

But what's especially new here is the development of a strong and complex female character. McKay was worried that "the girl is running away with the story" (Letter to Bradley Dec. 12, 1929). In spite of the resumption of their romance, and although "he had grown accustomed to a vagabond way of life and love," Lafala seems not to be content to stay in this diasporic world, though it "was hard for him to

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[67] As Gary Holcomb notes, Lafala's situation replicates McKay's own status, which caused him many difficulties moving about in North Africa and parts of Europe (186-187).

wrench himself away from that. But with Aslima accompanying him the new life might be tolerable" (61). Lafala still dreams of returning to Africa, his "native bush." Aslima, too, becomes taken by the dream. His social mobility is enabled not by feet, but by money—which he tells Aslima is "better than feet."

In order to resume their romance Aslima has to convince her pimp, Titin, that she is not collecting money from Lafala because she plans to trick him once his compensation money comes in. Aslima is playing the role of a double agent, and setting her pimp and Lafala against each other. By the middle of the novel it's unclear what the main plot is—the romance of a return to Africa, which Aslima has now been seduced by, or a romance between Lafala and Aslima that is thwarted because of her economic subjugation to Titin. It's also unclear who is deceiving whom. Does Aslima fall for Lafala even though she deceived him before? Does she want his money? Or does she, too, become taken in not so much by the love plot, but by the romance of a return to Africa? Likewise, does Lafala really trust Aslima? If not, why spend time with her? As McKay's letter indicates, his motivation seems to be sex.

Though Aslima is defeated in the end, the novel nonetheless narrates the particular dilemma of female sex workers and the strengths Aslima develops in her efforts to survive. Through Lafala, Aslima begins to gain independence from Titin. When Titin criticizes the way Aslima is handing Lafala, she says, "If you think you know this game better than me you'd better put on a skirt" (79). Rather than portray Titin as a pimp protecting her from dangerous clients, Aslima saves Lafala's life when Titin attacks the legless man, thinking that Lafala and Aslima are deceiving him. And then Aslima convinces Titin that it's all part of her scheme.

As McKay described the plot in a letter to Bradley:

> Basically I am writing a sentimental story about Taloufa.[68] His character is changed by his fortune—but that is also a common human thing.…It's the girl Zhima who runs away with the story.…The climax comes when Lafala is arrested just when he was about to ship away and Malty and others have to try and get him freed. To make Lafala [word illegible] acceptable I should have to write a real sob-sister story and that I just cannot do. (December 21, 1929)

The heterosexual romance in the novel ends tragically. In a letter to Bradley, McKay describes a curious schema for resolving the plot. He claims that

> sophisticated readers will forgive Lafala's sentimentality because it isn't a [soft?] heart sentimentality but the sentimentality of sensuality arising out of his strong sexual appetite and the weakness of the flesh. In the end he gets put off it by his own deliberate action and it is Aslima who suffers for she is totally sincere. (March 30, 1930)

This attitude toward sex seems to echo McKay's words of a few years earlier to Harold Jackman: "Sex is a primitive, natural, unlawful thing. Marriage is a legal affair regulated by the economic conditions of human beings" (May 9, 1928).

The shipping agent advises Lafala that to travel with her he should first marry her so that "then your lady will have the status of a wife and so be protected against any untoward incidents on board" (97). In turn, Aslima tries to bargain with Titin—she wants him to marry her as a reward for getting Lafala's money. Titin is the son of

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[68] Taloufa was Lafala original name, from a character in *Banjo*. Aslima was originally named Zhima.

French country laborers, but a white master to Aslima, whom he regards as a savage. Even in his own economic interest he refuses and says he won't besmirch his family name, "Because it was an unthinkable thing—the idea of marrying a whore, a woman whose card of identity was the yellow card of prostitution, a woman without family, without home, without name. . . . Wherever she went and whatever she did she was in the clutch of the social law, the police record would trace her down to the third and fourth generation" (116-7). Titin views men who do marry prostitutes as socially inferior; to him they are "degenerates and perverts." Aslima, however, wants the protection of marriage, and complains to Titin: "You're all crazy about marrying a pure girl" (118).

Though it may seem McKay writes an odd, but clearly heterosexual, love triangle, other elements of the plot undermine any interpretive effort to read this text as heteronormative. As in all of McKay's work, racial and economic factors are plotted into the romance. As noted, Titin, though of the laboring classes, won't marry the African Arab Aslima, since she is not European and because she is a prostitute. Aslima's desire for Lafala is sexual, but he also represents freedom from being economically controlled by a pimp. Moreover, *Romance*, as in McKay's other works, also openly depicts homosexual characters, male and female. Aslima's rival, a character known as La Fleur Noir is a lesbian, as is her Greek pimp.

More than in his other works, *Romance* depicts the challenges faced by male homosexual couples, so much so that McKay's agent William Bradley and his editor at Harper, Eugene Saxton, both expressed concern over the detailed and sympathetic portrayal of male homosexual characters in the novel. They insisted parts of the story

would have to be cut if the book were to be published, a demand McKay at first adamantly refused (Letter to Bradley, August 28, 1930). In the novel, a mixed race gay couple, Big Blonde and Petit Frere, appear several times, as they socialize with others in Dreamport. Petit Frere gets into an insult-filled argument with a female prostitute, whose anger partly stems from the fact that, as another character notes, "The little brothers steal business away from them" (157). The woman insults Petit Frere verbally and takes "paper full of filth from her basket and slapped it in Petit Frere's face," screaming, "There! That is your life" (159). McKay ends this scene almost with a plea for tolerance as Big Blonde, upset and "crying softly" (160) laments the cruelty men such as he and Petit Frere have to endure.

Although Aslima is initially dubious about leaving Dreamport for Africa, she has a mystical vision of a mythical return to Africa, a return to an Islamic Arab past. In her vision Aslima prays so "that the lost dominions of her people might be restored" to the golden age of her people" when they were conquerors, stretching between the "pillars of Hercules" and Marseilles (92).

At the end of the second section of the book, Lafala simply disappears, as per the details from the true-life case on which McKay based his novel. Lafala is arrested, but with the help of his friends he is able to escape. However, he escapes not just prison, but he leaves Marseilles entirely, and without Aslima.

In his letter to Bradley, McKay reveals that Aslima "gets hurt because she is totally sincere." Her ending is tragic indeed. Titin realizes he's been double-crossed by Aslima, and he confronts her. When he threatens her, she simply says, "Take it then and stop shouting" (170). Imagining Titin is going to kill Lafala--she has a

vision of Lafala standing between her and Titin--she draws her knife. She throws "her hands up like a bird of prey about to swoop down upon a victim and pitched headlong" in Titin's direction. His back literally against the door, Titin shoots her to death, gratuitously emptying all of his bullets into her body (171). Although Aslima seems to die for Lafala, the vision of him at the end recalls the vision she has of North Africa. At novel's end it seems the romance ends tragically and the quest ambiguously. Though Lafala departs, it's uncertain that he ever makes it back home or that once there, it satisfies his desires. For her part, Aslima gets nothing, and it's unclear if she dies for the love of a man or the love of the romance of Africa. McKay concludes his novel in such a way as to leave both plots, the male epic quest for home and the female romance plot of love and marriage, unfulfilled.

Part II: Home to Banana Bottom

In *The Politics of Modernism*, Raymond Williams characterizes the modernist writer as a "restlessly mobile emigré or exile." His critique emphasizes writers' responses to the "strangeness" of the modern world by "rais[ing] to the level of universal myth this intense, singular narrative of unsettlement, homelessness, [and] solitude." He also notes that such writers' "represent the artist as necessarily estranged." Williams is writing critically about writers who thus "ratify as canonical the works of radical estrangement" (32-35). His critique focuses exclusively on European and white American writers. This characterization is part of Williams' critique of modernism as a movement of isolated artists who failed to produce texts of social or political relevance.

Like Williams, Marianna Torgovnick in *Gone Primitive* also emphasizes the condition of homelessness as important to the production of modernist texts. Torgovnick uses Georg Lukács's concept of "transcendental homelessness" to exemplify the modern world, the world which produced the novel. According to Torgovnick, the condition of exile or cultural estrangement and the consequent desire to "go home" are the grounding conditions for modernist interest in the primitive. "Whatever form the primitive's hominess takes, its strangeness salves our estrangement from ourselves and our culture . . . 'going home' like 'going primitive' is inescapably a metaphor for the return to origins" (185).

In *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987) Houston Baker asserts that the traditional understanding of modernism does not account for the experience of African Americans who were the contemporaries of British, Anglo American and

Irish high modernists. By focusing on the use of formal and linguistic experimentation and innovation among black writers, Baker makes a case for an Afro-American modernism which is separate and distinct from a modernism "bequeathed by a civilization that, in its prototypical form, is exclusively Western, preeminently bourgeois, and optically white" (6).

In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy states that:

> For whites, the aesthetics of modernism may have centered on a 'detachment if not revulsion from the human' captured in the image of Gregor Samsa as a beetle. . . . For the African diaspora, constituted for several centuries as a milieu of dispossession, modernity raised a different set of issues centering on the need to recover and validate black culture and reincarnate a sense of being and belonging which had been erased from it by slavery.

If the experience of European and white American writers has reflected and been understood as one that emphasizes the solitary, the detached, what Williams calls the experience of "radical estrangement," for subjects of the African diaspora the experience of modernity emphasizes the need (repeating Gilroy's key terms): "to reincarnate a sense of being and belonging."

Anne McClintock begins *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* with Columbus:

> Consider, to begin with, a colonial scene.
>
> In 1492, Christopher Columbus, blundering about the Caribbean in search of India, wrote home to say that the ancient mariners had erred in

> thinking that the earth was round. Rather, he said, it was shaped like a woman's breast, with a protuberance upon its summit in the unmistakable shape of a nipple--toward which he was slowly sailing.
>
> Columbus' image fetishizes the earth as a cosmic breast, in relation to which the epic male hero is a tiny, lost infant, yearning for the Edenic nipple. The image of the earth-breast is here redolent not with the male bravura of the explorer, invested with his conquering mission, but with an uneasy sense of male anxiety, infantilization and longing for the female body. At the same time, the female body is figured as marking the boundary of the cosmos and the limits of the known world . . . (21-22)

As stated, the problem of "going home" is a major theme in many of Claude McKay's writings. His last novel, *Banana Bottom* (1933), is commonly described (and often criticized) as McKay's sentimental return to origins that appropriates (and celebrates) a conventional western romance plot.

As Simon Gikandi notes, the inaugural moment of modernity expressed in the voyages of discovery elides the experience and history of the slaves and the colonized. In *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature*, Gikandi writes:

> Caribbean literature and culture are haunted by the presence of the 'discoverer' and the historical moment he inaugurates. For if Columbus's 'discovery' of the Americas and his initial encounters with the peoples of the New World have paradigmatic value in the European episteme because they usher in a brave new world, a world of modernity and modernist forms . . . these events also trigger a

> contrary effect on the people who are 'discovered' and conquered. And while Eurocentric scholars have been eager to claim the conquest of the Americas as a radical and exemplary event that opens up the Old World's reconceptualization of its cultural traditions and temporality, and the constitution of the colonial other, Caribbean writers and scholars exhibit extreme anxiety and ambivalence toward the beginnings of modernity and modernism. (1-2)

As new historical works on the early modern period, such as Louis Montrose's "The Work of Gender in the Voyage of Discovery," Michel de Certeau's *The Writing of History*, and Peter Hulme's *Colonial Encounters* all note, the "origins" of modernity are not about just conquest and obliteration, but also about textualization and production. Besides "haunting" Caribbean literature, the voyages of Columbus et al.--heroic in scope and epic in nature--mapped the New World by figuring it as a female body, producing a primitive Other to western civilization. The story of modernity has thus been written on the female body, making it a metonym for the New World and icon of the primitive Other. Modernist writers make use of primitivism as a way to tell of their own quest and thus continue this obliteration.

Keeping in mind Gikandi's words and the story of western discovery, I'd like to propose reading McKay's fictional journey home as more than just a private excursion. Rather than perceive it as a pastoral retreat from modernity, I will consider why McKay chose to tell the story of a homecoming by telling the story of a black woman, and, moreover, a story which specifically focuses on that woman's sexuality. While Felix's story in *Nightwood* depicts him as an outcast due to his race and reveals

Europe as a place culturally invested in inscribing (literally, in the case of Nikka the nigger) racial others, especially Jews and Blacks, McKay appropriates the romance plot to re-tell a story of national and sexual conquest in the Americas.

Although McKay, the "rebel sojourner" of Wayne Cooper's biography, traveled throughout his life, his "homelessness" provides a different--and socially relevant-- nuance to Williams' "restlessly mobile emigré" who suddenly finds himself alienated from a rapidly changing world. Williams critiques D.H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway for choosing "to leave their homes and settle nowhere" (32). McKay left his 'home' of Jamaica when he was twenty-two, and never returned.

Like modernity itself, *Banana Bottom* begins with a transatlantic voyage. But unlike the western narrative of modernity, McKay's story, like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, begins not in Europe, but in the Caribbean; it tells a tale not of the male hero, but the life of a young woman.

Criticism of *Banana Bottom* frequently focuses on whether Bita Plant, after receiving a western education, can be accepted back into her native community. Critics read the novel as a journey of self-acceptance in which Bita comes to terms with both sides of herself--western and native, civilized and natural. Set in Jamaica, the story commences with Bita Plant's return to her homeland from England, where she has been given a Western education. While the novel itself is ostensibly the story of her return, the novel is also and is especially the history of a diverse black community. The novel depicts a multitude, and sometimes a cacophony, of voices, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. The economic forces that led to the formation of Banana Bottom, Bita's home town, and its relation to the town of Jubilee is told in the

opening pages and is a crucial context for understanding Bita's life and the variety of stories, songs, and folktales that are embedded in her story.

The trajectory of Bita's story reveals that the intellectual and sensual which are divided in primitivist thinking never were separate, except in the mind of the white missionary couple who adopt Bita, Priscilla and Malcolm Craig. This is evidenced by the way the Craigs attempt to contain her sexuality.

Bita Plant's life is determined by her racial identity and the story of her rape. I consider Bita's encounter with Crazy Bow as just that--a story of a rape. Although critical interpretation of the novel tends to accept the Craigs' position that the "rape" was a bad deed done to Bita, as it's actually described in the novel, Bita and Crazy Bow have sex as a result of Bita repeatedly climbing on top of him, until he is finally unable to resist her aggressive advances. It is possible then to read the scene not so much as one of violation, but, as Heather Hathaway also notes, of agency.

The novel itself, moreover, reveals a variety of responses to the incident. Sister Phibby Patroll, the town gossip who confirms that Bita has had sex, thinks it's a "good thing done early" (15). Peasants, upon hearing the news that Bita is to be "adopted" by the Craigs and sent abroad, wish one of their children had been the "victim" of Crazy Bow (29). The ditty that locals sing in response to the incident reveals how Bita as a woman is to be forever marked by this event.

> You may wrap her up in silk,
> You may trim her up with gold,
> And the prince may come after
> To ask for your daughter,

But Crazy Bow was first. (14)

Bita herself seldom reflects on the rape, but when she does so what she recalls is this song and the pain that it inflicts, not the rape itself (52, 62). It is thus not the incident that stays in her memory, but the story told about the rape--it is the cultural narrative that deprives her of agency, not the event itself that resonates.

Indeed, the response of the Craigs decides the course of Bita's young life. Malcolm Craig finds "something of God's mysterious ways in the rape of Bita and the subsequent coming under his mission roof" (17). The Craigs want progeny to carry on their mission and be an example of the transformative power of western education and morality. Bita is chosen to be the recipient of their Christian good will because she has "fallen"--an interesting translation of an event they call rape--and thus needs redemption. She is chosen also to demonstrate the friendship between the families, especially between the male ancestors of Malcolm and Jordan. But Bita especially is chosen because of the inadequacy of the Craig's own failed progeny, the imbecile Patou, whose very existence pains Priscilla. Bita is thus the cultural experiment that is to make up for what they haven't been able to produce naturally.

If Bita is "rewarded" for being victimized sexually, it's the control over her sexuality that will determine the success of what the Craigs think of as their "civilizing work" (226). The Craigs believe that the inherent promiscuity of the natives is what limits their social advance:

> Sex was approached too easily. And for that reason some of the most promising young men and women who had been chosen or who had chosen the preaching and teaching profession often found themselves halted and

> worthless in the midst of their career. It wasn't because these people were oversexed, but simply because they seemed to lack that check and control that was supposed to be distinguishing of humanity of a higher and more complex social order and that they were apparently incapable of comprehending the opprobrium of breeding bastards in a Christian community. (16)

> Priscilla Craig had conceived the idea of redeeming her from the past by a long period of education without any contact with Banana Bottom, and at the finish she would be English trained and appearing in everything but the colour of her skin. (31)

Priscilla Craig begins to doubt the success of their experiment after she learns that Bita has attended a tea-meeting.

> Bita was atavistic as was her race. . . . Mrs Craig thought less of character as something intrinsically individual than as an essential of the development of a people, a nation, a class--flowering in the finest types . . . she wondered if she had not overdone things with Bita, demanding and expecting too much of her, considering the girl against the background of her race and its place in the Occidental idea of the universe. (92-3)

That Occidental idea is one that Herald Newton Day wholeheartedly supports. Upon proposing marriage to Bita, he says: "You know at first when I began studying of the ministry I thought that only a white woman could help me. One having a pure mind and lofty ideals like Mrs. Craig. For purity is my ideal of the married state.

With clean hearts thinking and living purely and bearing children under the benediction of God . . . You have been trained like a pure-minded white lady" (100).

Pure womanhood as exemplified by Priscilla is held up for ridicule by McKay. Priscilla's racism is expressed specifically though her discomfort with sexuality; her ability to fit the cultural ideal of white womanhood is evidenced by her sexual repression. The Craigs' maid, Rosyanna, is indignant that Priscilla should act as though she doesn't have sex with her husband (204). Priscilla says to Anty Nommy, "She could never understand a girl like Bita really falling in love with a man like Hopping Dick and to account for it she had come to the conclusion that Bita was at bottom a nymphomaniac" (221). Priscilla judges the parson's widow's announcement of remarriage; she believes women should follow Queen Victoria's example and never remarry (182).

Priscilla is non-plussed when she visits the exhibition of African art: "Priscilla Craig had never been to any part of the African Sudan, and these objects took her to a Negro world that was disturbingly different from that to which she was accustomed. For those small statues with important points exaggerated and others minimized the word that came to mind was 'grotesque'" (197-8). She dreams she returns to the exhibit and tries to touch a mask; it comes to life, and many masks then dance around her. Then she envisions Patou among them and then she, too, "was in motion and madly whirling round and round with the weird dancing masks" (199).

Thus, in her dream, her real progeny and then she are revealed to be the primitive. In her dream the primitive is unmasked for what it is: symbolic of her own fears of herself and what she herself has produced. Priscilla's nightmare, like Bita's

sexuality, when considered in the context of western narratives of modernity, takes on deeper significance than just exposing her own fears and revealing her barely-disguised racism. It unmasks the primitive as being a construction of the west--a place of fear, desire, lack of constraint.

Bita's education and refinement are defined as proper behavior toward men. While still at school, Bita is "taught" that the "crowning of her education" is to be married (109). But while her classmates ponder their own future, they can't imagine Bita's. As she tells Squire Gensir, they seemed to think she was plucked right out of savagery and would return to marry a cannibal (83).

That marriage and courtship are racialized ideals--and are codified that way--is evident in the courtship dialogue for youth at the Harvest Festival. The pre-inscribed tokens the black youths exchange include phrases such as: "I admire your blue eyes" "May I touch your little ivory hand?" and "Will you give me a tress of your golden hair?" (164).

The power of western narratives and their erasure of the reality of conquered lands and peoples is apparent in Bita's recollections of English school girls and how they perceive the West Indies. Her English classmates want to know things such as in what part of the Congo Jamaica is located, and if the cannibals prefer dark or white meat (82).

McKay's acute awareness of the power of stories forces his readers to note how he uses conventions while also undermining them. By exposing the western hegemony behind even such seemingly innocent stories, such as romances, McKay reveals that stories are not outside of culture, but help determine how lives can be

lived. If the story of the rape determines how Bita is treated, it is the cultural definition of womanhood, which is part of the foregrounding of the romance plot, that determines the type of story McKay can write for a female protagonist.

The marriage ending makes the novel seem rather conventional, especially since what Bita chooses is rural life with an uneducated peasant, Jubban, and the last scene reveals that she has given birth to a son. To biographer Wayne Cooper, McKay uses the marriage plot to accomplish what the picaresque male protagonists of McKay's first two novels (and McKay himself) could not: to "reconcile through marriage her educated self with her peasant origins in a black community that had created for itself a way of life free of the white missionary efforts to mold it wholly in Western patterns of morality and behavior" (316). What I want to stress is how McKay uses the plot as a convention--one that in life he would not have upheld. A bisexual believer in free love, McKay, though married briefly once, characterized himself as "a truant by nature and undomesticated in the blood" (*Long Way from Home* 150).

By concluding with Bita's marriage, McKay, rather than celebrating the heterosexual romance plot, indirectly offers a critique of it. From the start, the novel is about how women are defined and controlled by the intersections of race and sex. Bita capitulates to the idea of marrying Herald because of expectations placed on her as a woman. Moreover, the novel also reveals that Bita's social mobility is limited in spite of her education because she is from the "black and dark brown group."

Although *Banana Bottom* ends with two happy marriages, during the course of the novel McKay reveals how for Bita, because of her sex and the expectations of

her society--one that is defined by Western morality--there is no way out of this plot. As with the religious practices of many of the natives, which combine institutionalized Christianity with Obeah, the novel depicts a society in transition, how marriage is becoming institutionalized. A number of the peasants still have concubines rather than wives, and, to the consternation of the Craigs, have sex outside of marriage (as does Bita, who is pregnant when she marries Jubban).

In conversation with Squire Gensir, Bita begins to think about the various functions of marriage. To her surprise, he expounds--without judgment--on arranged marriages (126). Moreover, Priscilla's admiration for Gensir is ironic. Since he is an English gentleman by birth, Priscilla believes his morality, in spite of his avowed atheism, is unquestionable. She reads his bachelorhood as a sign of purity. Gensir's confirmed bachelorhood, however, is more properly to be read as coded homosexual, as was Walter Jekyll, McKay's mentor on whom McKay acknowledges this character is based.

After the incident with Crazy Bow, Bita has no control over the consequences and has to live with how others react to and comment on the deed. When she first returns to Jubilee she is easily re-immersed in her community. From the first song in which she accompanies the colored choristers, it is clear that Bita still belongs--that she is at home and she doesn't need the marriage plot to prove it. However, it is also clear that Bita doesn't feel free to act according to her own desires. When she wants to go to a tea meeting, Squire Gensir has to take her. She placidly accepts that she will have to marry Herald Newton Day. The choice of Jubban is then not just about integrating western and native, but is indicative of Bita taking control over her own

life.

McKay's conclusion capitulates to the demands of the romance plot. But I would argue that he radically reworks that plot; he uses and critiques it at the same time. In going home to Banana Bottom, what McKay reveals is that it is not just land that's colonized by narrative, but bodies as well.

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