

© 2014

Octavio R. Gonzalez

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

MISFIT MINORITIES: RESISTING UPLIFT IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY FICTION

By

OCTAVIO RAFAEL GONZALEZ

A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School—New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in English

Written under the direction of

Marianne DeKoven and Rebecca L. Walkowitz

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October 2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Misfit Minorities: Resisting Uplift in Twentieth-Century Fiction

By OCTAVIO R. GONZALEZ

Dissertation Co-Directors:

Rebecca L. Walkowitz and Marianne DeKoven

My dissertation develops the concept of the misfit minority, a literary sensibility emergent in the twentieth century, which enacts an ethos of resistance to collective uplift, bourgeois respectability, and liberal personhood. This sensibility is shaped by the experience of double exile: from majority culture and cultural identity. Such misfit outlooks represent a continuing yet under-acknowledged and under-theorized challenge to late-modern identity movements and liberal society. “Misfit Minorities” is devoted to making visible the diversity of political and ethical claims made by minoritized authors of modernist and postmodern literary fiction, and to rethinking the normal ranges of agency and political norms within a context of resistance to these norms. My interest in advocating for the literary-cultural narratives of misfit minorities is in service to a “queer” or non-normative vision of collectivity that allows for the ugly feelings, and the figures for such feelings, that are disowned by modern minoritarian norms of uplift and noble resistance to majority culture, rather than complicity with it. Misfit minorities are haunted by the false universals of social privilege: they remind us of those who remain in the shadows, whose tongues remain tied, which is why we should look for them, listen to them, and understand them.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation has been developing for many years, and in many guises. I could not have accomplished so much of this work without the support of so many friends, colleagues, and family.

At Rutgers University, Carlos Decena, Nimanthi Rajasingham, Philip Longo, Tyler Bradway, and Joshua Gang were crucial intellectual interrogators and readers of my work. I owe them a great debt for the intellectual and emotional support they gave me. Josh and Phil in particular helped me in the thornier, early stages of the project. I wish to thank the many people who participated in the Modernist Studies Group, the Twentieth & Twenty-First Century Group, the Postcolonial Studies Group, and the Queer Research Group for their support and their productive sessions over the years. Other scholarly friends and colleagues were important in numerous capacities over the years. I thank Debapriya Sarkar, Mark DiGiacomo, Manuel Betancourt, and too many others to list have been part of the wonderful family of support in the Graduate English program. I also want to thank Sue Hodson, Curator at The Huntington Library, for allowing me to use some of the archival material in the Christopher Isherwood Papers. Drawing on that archive, a version of Chapter 3 appeared in Winter 2013 of *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*.

Within Rutgers University, Harriet Davidson, Elin Diamond, Richard Dienst, Nicholas Gaskill, Andrew Goldstone, Ann Jurecic, Michelle Stephens, Margaret Ronda, Stéphane Robolin, Cheryl Wall, and Allan Isaac have made a big difference in my success as a graduate student and nascent literary scholar. They have read my work, listened to my ideas, and given me generous feedback time and time again. I also want to thank Evie Shockley for her wonderful and practical support and for her example as a double threat: an accomplished poet and literary critic of the highest magnitude. Cheryl Robinson and Courtney Borack have been such a source of support, I want to acknowledge how much they mean to me and to our program. And I want to thank, again,

Allan Isaac and Carlos Decena, especially, for showing me that it is possible to make it through tenure and survive—and thrive!— as a queer man of color.

In my academic career, I have benefited from nurturing relationships with friends and teachers almost too numerous to mention. I want to thank the Mellon Mays Fellowship Program for their unstinting support over the years, as well as the faculty and administrators at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania State University, Rutgers University Graduate School, the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their support throughout my studies.

At Pennsylvania State University, I want to thank Robert Caserio, Jeffrey Nealon, Michael Bérubé, Jane Juffer, and especially Janet Lyon, for their support in the early years of my graduate training. Rachel Teukolsky was also an amazing mentor to me. My friends and colleagues from my Penn State days include Pia Deas, Amy Clukey, and Liz Kuhn of the Modernist Studies Group.

I also especially want to thank David Kurnick and John Kucich for the many years of patient guidance and direction they have given me. They have read numerous drafts of my work, debated ideas with me, disagreed with me, and written numerous letters of recommendation for me. I also want to thank Heather Love, for being such a generous mentor and figure of inspiration, as the project developed. Most importantly, I want to thank Rebecca Walkowitz and Marianne DeKoven for their incredible insight and collective wisdom. They helped me place my work in relation to important conversations, and most importantly sharpened my capacities to analyze literature and culture in the modern and contemporary eras. Their unstinting generosity toward me helped me develop many of my literary critical skills.

Before graduate school, I was a member of the Gay Poets gathering, where I met such wonderfully supportive and inspiring poets as Rigoberto González, Michael Broder, Steven Cordova, Ron Drummond, David Groff, Scott Hightower, Dean Kostos, and Jason Schneiderman.

I also want to thank Michael Broder, Deborah Landau, María Melendez, and, last but not least, Francisco Aragón. They have all helped me find and extend my voice as a poet.

As an undergraduate, I was lucky to have an incredible role model in Patricia White, who remains an inspiration. Thank you, Patty. I also shared many espressos with the late George Moskos, who remains always in my memory. He, too, showed me it was possible to be a successful, and proud, queer academic. Chuck James, Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot Professor Emeritus at Swarthmore, was a dear mentor to me over the years, as were Hugh Lacey and Philip Weinstein.

As an ugly duckling in high school—a misfit, indeed—I found my circle of friends under the auspices of the *Patterns* literary magazine. Sharon Lustbader, who read Ed White's *A Boy's Own Story*, after I told her it meant a lot to me. You have been an incredible resource for me over the years, showing me what it means to be a teacher, especially outside the classroom. Lynda, you came up to me in our freshman year English class, and asked if I wanted to share writing with you. We have been sharing such moments, and our writing, ever since. As for this, as for so much more (too much more—but what else do best friends in high school ask of us?) I thank you.

I want to thank my partner and companion, Brian P. Fuss, who has been at my side over the last few years, and now travels with me to the next stage of my academic life. He has shown me how to love someone in ways that are by turns sincere, funny, and ongoing. He provides me with a sentimental education that I cherish, and that I wish on everyone to experience. Self-loving begins at home, which is one moral of the story of *Misfit Minorities*.

Speaking of home, members of my family, nuclear and extended, have been there for me when nobody else could—the definition of family. They've been there since before my first words in English: "Silence everybody here!" (It is both funny and cringe worthy that the first words I uttered in my adopted tongue commanded that everyone else be quiet.) Members of my extended family, over the years, include Dawn Heather Bossman, Alvin J. Fung, and Mark Trushkowsky.

My beloved sister and brother, Ismenia and Jackson, have taught me more than they know. My father, Julián, and my mother, Eva, have loved me more than I can ever know. I know at least that much. And I want to thank Santiago, my adopted father, and Rosy, former counselor and adopted mother. They've shown me, in different ways, the possibility of redemption.

Finally, I want to thank writing—in any language—for providing me not only a means to escape the mundane, but also providing a means to fight back, to change social reality for the better.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii–vi
Table of Contents	vii
Introduction:	
Haunting Fictions of Belonging: The Double Exile of the Misfit Minority	i–45
Chapter 1:	
Wallowing With “Wallie”: Wallace Thurman’s Pyrrhic Victory	46–113
Chapter 2:	
This Myth Which Is Not One:	
The Legend of Jean Rhys and the Fiction of “Inferior Being”	114–196
Chapter 3:	
Isherwood’s Impersonality:	
Ascetic Self-Divestiture and Queer Relationality In <i>A Single Man</i>	197–236
Chapter 4:	
Ishiguro’s Imaginary Geographies:	
Spatial Grammar and the Political Allegory of <i>Never Let Me Go</i>	237–286
Bibliography	287–299

INTRODUCTION

Haunting Fictions of Belonging: The Double Exile of the Misfit Minority

You can only read against the grain if misfits in the text signal the way.
—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak¹

The discussion that follows sets the theoretical groundwork for the exigence of this study, by discussing the epistemic importance of social identity and minority experience in a contemporary cultural moment that has, in some ways, brought back the salience of identity politics. I begin with the notion of double exile, which is the thematic cornerstone of this study of “misfit minorities,” especially with regard to the experiences of multiple or intersectional identities. I disentangle this notion from a particularly resonant cultural location, that of the double exile of sexual minorities. I then look at Satya Mohanty’s “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity,” which many credit with opening up a space in which to work with the entailments of identity after postmodernism. I then turn to a debate about the reclamation of identity in the field of queer studies, by looking at an alternative genealogy of queer theory proposed by Michael Hames-García in his critique of the field of queer studies in “Queer Theory Revisited.”² Then, I delve into some of the political issues with Hames-García’s position—which falls under the aegis of queer-of-color critique—by engaging with Janet Halley’s *Split Decisions*. Halley’s argument is generative for my ideological and conceptual commitments. Her book delves into the recent history of feminist theory and criticism, and she argues against the repeated pressures in the field to conform to norms of ideological purity.³ Using Halley’s ground-clearing notion of “Taking

a Break from Feminism,” I leverage the allied positions of postpositivist realism and queer-of-color critique, and argue for a different approach to the contemporary study of identity and social minorities. Halley’s model of practicing an “hedonics of critique” contests the type of epistemological and political purity tests that strong theories of convergence, in her terms, seem to make, whatever politics of identity they stand for or against. Parts V and VI of this Introduction present further details of my argument, and provide chapter summaries and a conclusion.

In sum, this Introduction delves into the conditions of double exile that attend to the representation of the misfit minority, as a distinct sensibility, theoretically informed by queer critique, although not limited to the experience of sexual minorities. The misfit minority, in the conceptual and historical terms I know best, is a “Before Stonewall” sensibility—except it is not strictly limited to the eras before Stonewall, and not necessarily restricted to queer identity. By Before Stonewall, I mean a sensibility that strikes our contemporary political moment as being antiquated, pre-liberation: being closeted in the age of Ellen DeGeneres. To counter our contemporary moment’s optimism, which implicitly argues that such a culturally anachronistic position is at best implausible, and, at worst, politically indefensible, this study argues that the persistence of such misfit standpoints as internalized homophobia, along with other internalized —isms, are still with us, among us, despite our narratives of cultural optimism and uplift. Miss Kilman is hiding in plain sight.⁴ And many others, too. If we have difficulty seeing them—reading them—then it is still important to listen to them, no matter how noxious their political perspective.

For such unreconstructed, pre-liberation structures of feeling are not going anywhere as long as we ignore them.

I: Double Exile, Beyond Sexuality

Miss Kilman is still hiding in plain sight. This phrase encapsulates the idea of the minority figure, living in shadow, haunting redemptive tales of cultural belonging. These figures haunt more common, uplifting narratives of cultural development, which accompany the twentieth century's various and interrelated movements for social liberation. A strain of fictional representation, a misfit sensibility, shadows triumphant narratives of cultural becoming, and overcoming, which inform prevailing progressive notions of minoritarian twentieth-century fiction. The historical experiences of these dissident subjects, untouched by cultural liberation, are traced in the literary writings that themselves illustrate their profound limitations as cultural documents of alienation.

In this study, representations of what I am calling the misfit minority turn on a dialectic of double exile—haunting the belonging of the groups to which they belong, as well as haunting the belonging of majority culture to which they *also* belong, as subjects of double consciousness. These *minority reports*, from a doubly displaced position, insist on perpetuating the darkest themes of social subordination. These are the themes of dispossessed personhood, negative affects or “ugly feelings,” impersonal relations, and a mode of subjectivity premised on self-abnegating or self-defeating attachments to identity. Such misaligned meanings could be called *mis*-identifications: identifying with majority culture and oppressive socialization, which entails a complicity with hegemony, and a

disposition of weakness, ignorance, and self-divestment, as we see in Kazuo Ishiguro's science-fiction novel about human clones who never rebel.

The misfit minority position is not simply that of a subject who, while dissident from collective identity norms, nonetheless sustains an oppositional political orientation to the majority culture. This version of dissident identification, memorably articulated by José Esteban Muñoz in *Disidentifications*, retains a sense of political propriety that misfit minorities, in my study, often seem to lack.⁵ By contrast, then, misfit identification or misidentification goes one step further: not oppositional, but at times seemingly complicit, betraying one's imagined community by refusing the injunction to uplift, or the norms of middle-class respectability that dominate the public sphere. These are the subjects who do not fit in anywhere: not with "us," not with "them"; they are both and neither, stuck or always shifting, never at home anywhere.

The experience of double exile is at times taken to entail sexual dissidence: queers are the quintessential double exiles in cultural narratives, like Muñoz's, that illustrate the difficulties of intersectional identity when these cultural forms may conflict morally. Queerness, intersected with identifications based on race, ethnicity, nationality, or disability, has historically entailed the queer subject's double exile from one's family or local culture, and from majority culture. Bringing up your kid to be gay, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's provocative essay reminds us, is not the norm but the exception, regardless of how much progress has occurred in gay integration into the public sphere.⁶ The potential for queers' being exiled from their families, workplaces, and the public sphere itself—as

evident in laws outlawing homosexuality around the globe—suggests that double exile is a persistent risk of embracing a gay identity.

Queers thus seem, historically, unlike other cultural minorities embedded in social cycles of generational transmission in the face of the indifference and hostility of the social majority. The representations of queer people of color, since the 1980s, have made great inroads in documenting and thereby mitigating the queer experience of double exile. As African-American gay poet and activist Essex Hemphill provocatively phrased it in the film *Tongues Untied* (1989): Forced to choose either to live as an out gay man, or continue to be Black, is like having to choose one nut over the other.⁷ Since Hemphill spoke those words, intersectional queer activism has become, if not the dominant strain of queer studies (in the academy), then at least one central field, rather than the doubly exiled figure of Hemphill, on the screen, having to choose between one identity or the other.

Indeed, Heather Love's influential *Feeling Backward* is a touchstone text for understanding the toxic affects of double exile that queers have historically experienced. Love's backward-feeling subjects of literary history—notably Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* (1928), famous for its melancholic story of trans embodiment—are sexual minorities. Love's subjects precede Gay Liberation by fifty years, and it shows: their self-loathing makes liberated queers recoil. Which is Love's point: we cannot ignore this historical emotional morass, because it is part of the collective history of sexual oppression: and it may not be past. The subjects who inhabit and reproduce these feelings also exist, Love posits, in this very moment—and the news confirms this insight, as it confirms the number of gay bashings and teen suicides due to homophobic bullying and gender-based

persecution. The paradox Love hones in on is how gay liberation often leads to a willful forgetting of this painful past, before Stonewall and the contemporary era of marriage equality.

Love's argument ultimately uncovers an important insight about this contemporary age: there are self-loathing queers among us, even with Pope Francis' "Who am I to judge?" The advances in acceptance of queer folks in the public sphere must not overshadow the queers who remain left behind. This is Love's warning. At the extreme, she makes a claim for the need for, and importance of, negative stereotypes of homosexuals: queers behaving badly. Love argues for the queer kid in Kansas who contemplates suicide—not to mention the queer people of color, especially trans people of color, who remain physical targets even in "gay Meccas" like New York and San Francisco. These everyday queers may have little access to the benefits of marriage, military service, and other hard-won (though uneven) political victories for the assimilation of queers into this American life.

My project, then, departs from this constellation of concerns, and this question: There are double exiles, yes, who are queer; but are there misfit minorities who are not? Or, to put it another way, Why must the position of double exile be about sexual dissidents? This study engages this broad-based question, whether any constituent of a marginalized group can inhabit the misfit position, left in the wake of that group's advancement through social and cultural belonging and political advocacy. As with the backward-feeling queers in Love's study, other social experiences reflect these backward feelings, these ugly feelings.⁸

In fact, the issue of double exile as a risk of sexual minorities that share other identities echoes previous debates, such as the intersectional problematic of race and class

in the context of feminism.⁹ In this wider frame of reference, being gay is not as unique as it may at first seem. So this study asks: What can we learn by looking at the writings of other stigmatized groups, who may not be queer, but may experience the feelings of backwardness and isolation that Hemphill describes as recently as the 1980s?

Here we enter the dangerous territory of the misfit minority, where we hear those anachronistic whisperings: Uncle Tom. Self-hating Jew. Tragic mulatto. Scab. False consciousness. Are these toxic cultural constructs of identity a thing of the past? Or are they limited to queers who are also colored, trans, disabled, poor? Is it possible to think through the unreconstructed attachment to the backward feelings of identity, no matter in what form these identity constructs appear? And not exclusively pertaining to the ostracism of queers?

II. Postmortem on the Postmodern

Since the 1990s, Satya P. Mohanty, Linda Martín Alcoff, and other members of the Future of Minority Studies Research Institute (FMS), have advanced a comprehensive repudiation of the tenets of what Mohanty called “theoretical postmodernism” (what we now loosely call poststructuralism), as elaborated in the North American academy.¹⁰ According to postpositive realists, we still operate under the hegemony of theoretical postmodernism’s understandings of the subject, the social, and the political.¹¹ These are understandings opposed to any master narratives, such as Marxism, or feminism, that seek to explain the politics of reality, to borrow from Marilyn Frye, in terms of a key conception of history—patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism.¹² Poststructuralism hollowed out these politically oriented master narratives as devoid of solid foundations—the essences of

identity were seen as nominal, not natural; arbitrary, not objective; illusory, not realistic. “Theory” became the catchall term for the far-reaching epistemological and ideological influence of a radical, post-Marxist, poststructuralist French philosophical tradition.¹³ This postmodern theoretical tradition, opposed to the activist-inspired foundations of earlier theories of social actors and political praxis, is identified with philosophical deconstruction (Derrida), structuralist psychoanalysis (Lacan), and queer theory (Foucault and his heirs, notably Rubin, Butler, and Sedgwick).

What ties together these antiessentialist theoretical traditions is the fact that they were an outgrowth of the Sixties, activist-inspired politics of the new social movements and their scholarly articulations. For the purposes of this Introduction, the more salient of these earlier movements and theorizations are lesbian and women-of-color/working class feminism, and lesbian and gay studies. Publications such as The Combahee River Collective’s “A Black Feminist Statement”; *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*; and *This Bridge Called My Back* are touchstones of post-Sixties activist-inspired interventions set to combat intersecting systems of oppression based on race, gender, and sexuality.¹⁴ The notion of intersectionality names the pre-Foucauldian, activist-originating, coalitional understanding that such social forms of identity often overlap, and thus require a collective effort to combat forms of oppression that target individuals and collectivities who share multiple identifications in one body or person. Intersectional understanding of the plurality of social identities, and of multiple identities as comprising overlapping social oppressions, is a key feature of 1970s and ’80s feminisms, especially the groundbreaking critique of the Combahee Rive Collective.

The rise of theoretical postmodernism during the so-called linguistic turn in the 1980s, however, saw the status of cultural identity, intersectional included, as insufficient grounding for politics or positive knowledge. Postmodernism's "case" against "identity politics," in the words Mohanty uses in a landmark 1993 essay, was based "on the charge that 'experience' is not a self-evident or reliable source of knowledge, and that it cannot be seen as grounding a social identity" ("Epistemic" 43). Mohanty adds:

Postmodernists typically warn against the desire to consider experience a foundation of other social meanings; they point to the fact that personal experiences are basically rather unstable and slippery, and since they can only be interpreted in terms of linguistic or other signs they must be heir to all the exegetical and interpretive problems that social signification brings with it. (Ibid)

As opposed to this overly poststructuralist, obsessively textual understanding of social signification (emblematic in Derrida's *il n'y a pas d'hors-texte*), Mohanty's essay argues for a "naturalist-realist account" of "experience" and its entailments, including the experiences of institutionalized racism, sexism, and homophobia, as "reliable and genuine knowledge" (44). Perhaps the most classic "case" against identity politics (to continue Mohanty's forensic or prosecutorial metaphor)—that is to say, the case against using subjective "experience" as sufficient grounding for making truth-claims and value-claims about what is known (theory), and what is worth fighting for (praxis)—is Joan Scott's "The Evidence of Experience."¹⁵ Scott prioritizes not the experience itself, but how it is "constructed"—a characteristic focus for the postmodern obsession with the *mise en abîme* of signification (*how* experiences are "structured" by "discourse"), rather than on the *content* of these experiences and how this content evinces the highly hierarchical structures of knowledge and power.

But the postmodern critique of experience relied not only on poststructuralist strictures against any kind of foundationalism (especially foundationalisms of the body, reduced to virtual existence as just another “text”). The theoretical pushback against identity also recast politically oriented theoretical interventions based on this “evidence” dating back to the 1960s. Michael Hames-García, affiliated with collections that advance the return to the evidence of experience, emphasizes this aspect of the postmodern rejection of identity politics, in a widely known essay that provides a genealogical critique of queer theory.¹⁶ Based on the evidence of experience (or its most recent articulation as postpositive realism, although he does not use this term here), Hames-García argues that postmodernist theories of “queer” produced a retroactive misreading of these earlier experience-based, activist cultural movements and their understandings of identity.¹⁷ Queer theory is accused of a retroactive misreading that assumes that feminism under the banner of intersectional analysis (such as we see in lesbian/women-of-color/working-class feminism), were essentialist, or naively understood identity as a natural, and therefore fixed and homogenous, attribute. Hames-García’s is perhaps the most influential, though far from the first or the last critique of the queer theory canon’s elision of feminism, especially in promulgating a narrative of supersession that cast the older paradigm (let us call it the intersectional model) as theoretically unsophisticated, deriving a naïve understanding of reality as objectively knowable.¹⁸ Hames-García writes:

Queer theorists ... tend to focus on the movement away from identity-based theorizing and politics toward analyses of power and desire as fundamental to the constitution of subjectivity.... These narratives often depend on their coherence ... on ignoring earlier calls for understanding interconnections among forms of identity.
 (“Queer Theory Revisited” 26)

In short, theoretical postmodernism, and queer theory as one of its avant-gardes, saw intersectional analysis as misled in viewing minoritarian experience as an index of oppression, or as a diagnostic tool capable of enacting political change. By contrast, Theory's opposition to foundationalist claims—whether of objectivity, essence, or experience—entailed the evacuation of identity as a ruse of power. This evacuation took influential forms, such as the postmodern notion of the death of the subject (Foucault), and the death of the author (Barthes). Within this postmodern, poststructuralist frame, identity is a false essence, a limited and constraining social construct, and not a legitimate basis for theory or praxis. Since theory's heyday, however, Mohanty and other postpositive realists have sought to recuperate these older models of social theory, especially in their sophisticated understandings of intersectionality.

Mohanty, in seeking to resolve the same thorny issue that bedeviled Spivak ("strategic essentialism") and Butler ("contingent foundations"), to name only two proposed conceptual solutions to the same problem—namely, how to have postmodernism and have your political subject, too—led him to embrace philosophical traditions not usually associated with cultural theory, including analytic philosophy and American pragmatism.¹⁹ Also drawing also on feminist standpoint theory, and, indeed, on theoretical postmodernism, Mohanty challenges postmodern theory for its ironically absolute notion of objectivity, truth, and knowledge. I quote the following passage at length, because it encapsulates Mohanty's critique of postmodern theory. Mohanty claims that the "postmodernist response" to the notion that personal experience is always-already socially constructed, and therefore epistemologically suspect,

turns out to reveal a disguised form of foundationalism, for it remains within a specifically positivist conception of objectivity and knowledge. It assumes that the only kind of objective knowledge we can have is independent of (socially produced and revisable) theoretical presuppositions and concludes that the theory dependence of experience is evidence that it is always epistemically suspect. But what if we reject as overly abstract and limiting this conception of objectivity as presupposition-free knowledge? What if we give up both radical perspectivism and the dream of a “view from nowhere” in order to grant that all the knowledge we can ever have is necessarily dependent on theories and perspectives? We might then be able to see that there are different kinds and degrees of theory dependence and understand how theory-laden and socially constructed experiences can lead to a knowledge that is accurate and reliable. (“Epistemic” 36)

Mohanty’s first example of this new “realist” approach is in the domain of emotion.

Drawing on philosopher Naomi Scheman, he cites the case of “Alice,” who is a depressed woman who joins a consciousness-raising group, and then becomes angry with her lot in life (33–43). As Mohanty writes, Alice “comes to experience anger by reinterpreting her old feelings of depression [and] guilt ... but she does so ... with the aid of theory, an alternative, socially produced construction of herself and the world” (35). Interestingly, he anticipates the postmodern objection to this recuperation of “the evidence of experience,” even when socially mediated (as by the consciousness-raising group in this example). Emotions, Mohanty argues, “enable and encourage specific interpretations or evaluations of the world, and our judgment that Alice’s anger is rational, justified, or ... appropriate ... is a judgment about the accuracy of the interpretation and the objectivity of the evaluation” (37).

Indeed, such a judgment is not guaranteed by experience, but is grounded in it.

This is no return to “the silly idea that all emotions are equally justified or rational,”

Mohanty stresses (38). Hence, Alice’s newly forged feminist anger was found to be

“legitima[te] ... by looking at the features of the subject in her world ... [and by gleaning]

an accurate picture of these features ... through the right theory (or narrative or description)

[or] through the relevant information that we can examine and share” (38). Mohanty argues that his realism is no mere relativism, and thus that not all subjects enjoy what he calls the “epistemic privilege” of accessing experiences that depict social reality. And so, Mohanty contrasts Alice’s “justified” anger with the potential anger of her father or husband (38). The following passage provides a logical test for this account of theory-mediated objectivity:

If Alice’s father or husband were to become angry at Alice for supposedly betraying their trust by going to the consciousness-raising group meetings and by becoming dissatisfied with her personal relationships, *we would evaluate these emotions as we do Alice’s*. The anger may be sincerely felt, but *whether or not we consider it justified or legitimate would depend on what we think of the underlying political and moral views* of these men about the role of women in society, as well as the information (about themselves, about their society, and so on) they draw on—or ignore—to support these views. (38; emphasis added)

Mohanty recognizes that this kind of “objective” assessment of the truth claims of different individuals with different social experiences (even those who share the same feelings) is “complex and difficult” but eminently worth it. The endpoint is clarity regarding the justification (or lack thereof) of a given account of social reality. And so, despite the lack of *guarantee* for any experience—regardless of the social location of the subject, unlike in essentialist identity-politics—we may arrive at varying “degrees of socially constructed truth or error” (38). By extension, this process of understanding what Mohanty calls the “cognitive” or “epistemic” nature of experience, emotion, and identity “can serve as [the] source ... of objective knowledge *or socially produced mystification*” (Ibid; emphasis added).

What determines whether we believe Alice or her “father or husband” is our process of arriving at that determination: an analysis of the “underlying political and moral views” about the relevant social and ideological information the individual in question

“draws on—or ignore[s]—to support these views.” There is a circular reasoning here, which challenges the objectivity of such a process: wouldn’t those sympathetic to Alice’s “father or husband” believe their account, as opposed to hers? Rather than devolving into relativism (a he-said, she-said account of the case in question), Mohanty allows the critic’s ideological commitments to enter the picture as explicit “underlying political and moral views.”²⁰ Mohanty’s theory is above all a procedure of arriving at socially “justified” knowledge. He normatively privileges the experience of historically marginalized subjects, thereby granting them “epistemic privilege” in advance of any assessment of individual claims to social knowledge. But, the most important step in the process is the evaluative testing of the explanatory framework for any *accounting for that experience*. Mohanty thus argues for our taking the social and moral context of identity seriously, because it provides us relevant information that can be normatively evaluated, rather than seeing “identity” as an automatic, essential guarantee of moral virtue or objective knowledge. Every claim must be adjudicated, and partial ideological commitments—to social justice, to feminism, etc.—are part of the background and constitute the ground on which such claims are assessed. No universal positivism, and no naïve essentialism, but also no radical antifoundationalism, either: this is Mohanty’s vision of postpositive realism in the late twentieth century history of ideas regarding identity and the politics of experience.

With this background on the framework articulated by critics of the postmodern refusal of identity politics, I turn to the theoretical terrain central to the work of this dissertation, which is the contested field of contemporary queer studies “after” theory. In “Queer Theory Revisited,” Hames-García, a member of the FMS research group, draws

on a similar set of premises and ideological commitments to in some ways marginalize what has become the normative account of the genealogy of queer theory.²¹

III: After Queer Theory

As Hames-García notes, “Queer Theory Revisited” “trace[s] ... the ways queer theory has ... simplified our understanding of sexuality rather than added complexity to it” (44n2). His essay begins by critiquing queer theory as a discourse that ignores such complexities, notably race, gender, and class. Hames-García then offers an “alternative genealogy” to the standard story of the beginning of queer theory, where he views the origin of the study of sexuality in the nuanced intersectional work done “in the 1970s and 1980s” by “feminists, predominantly ... women of color” (43–44n2). The part of his argument that is a critique of queer theory as established in the 1990s, is summarized as follows.

Most queer genealogies chart a movement away from feminism to a study of sexuality and then a later addition of the question of race by people of color and queer theorists. However, critiques of mainstream feminism by straight women of color, white lesbians, and lesbians of color in the late 1970s and early 1980s were often accompanied ... by calls for more complicated analyses of sexuality and desire *as they relate to and complicate analyses of gender, race, and class*. Later many queer theorists moved to separate sexuality from gender, race, and class as a unique concern, justifying this move in part with the claim that sexuality is not *reducible* to the terms of the other categories. The move to isolate sexuality as a field of inquiry, however, simultaneously marginalizes the legacy of intersectional analysis and centers critical work that takes the whiteness of its objects of study for granted. In other words, theorists with an implicit commitment to maintaining the centrality of whiteness can claim to be doing the basic work of sexuality to which “race scholars” will add. (28)

Hames-García’s appraisal of queer theory’s unreconstructed whiteness is comprehensive.

He notes the lip service paid to the formula of humanities scholarship (the ubiquitous *race*,

class, and gender—or the dreaded “et cetera”) in the same accounts of sexuality that bracket off these “complexities.”²² In other words, for queer theory not to engage with sexuality using an intersectional approach, which looks at all of these different dimensions of experience in tandem, is tantamount to “tak[ing] the whiteness of its objects of study for granted.”

His notion for indicting queer theory on this basis is “ontological denial.”

Ontological denial is Hames-García’s accusation that queer theory is founded on an epistemology that is Eurocentric, and fails to integrate issues of race, class, and the history of colonialism, and also fails to acknowledge feminist precursors to Foucauldian queer critique.²³ Indeed, he claims, “In light of the actual publication of critical work on race and sexuality by queers of color” (including James Baldwin’s *Another Country* [1960], the first text in Hames-García’s counter-genealogy),

Queer theory and gay and lesbian studies have never adequately addressed the fact that they are founded on the erasure of a substantial body of critical literature by people of color at the same time that these bodies of work are *included* in queer genealogies for strategic purposes. I would like to propose that we have been there all along, and that arguments for an analysis of race, gender, class, and sexuality as inseparable are nothing particularly new, while arguments for their separation should be viewed with some suspicion as to their political motivations. (28)

What he calls “ontological denial” refers to the “erasure of a substantial body of critical literature by people of color.” His interesting gloss on contemporary “arguments for an analysis of race, gender, class, and sexuality as inseparable” seems to point to the renaissance in intersectional work in queer studies. Even the volume in which the essay appears, *Gay Latino Studies*, comes under a harsh light as “nothing particularly new,” as it combines the elements of experience already documented from feminist work of the 1970s

and 1980s. Moreover, Hames-García argues that what he calls the separatist account of sexuality (analyzed apart from gender, race, and class, among other entailments) commits ontological denial, a historical whitewashing of the highest magnitude: denying the existence of queer of color critique, for example, or women-of-color feminism: or merely including it as a “footnote” (26).

It is clear, then, that the target of Hames-García’s criticism is double. The main target is mainstream or “gay white male” queer theory, which, since Rubin and Sedgwick (though not Butler),²⁴ has produced many unitary analyses of sexuality, eschewing gender and the framework of feminism, not to mention a deep engagement with race and class.²⁵ Rubin, for one, is seen as an originator for this unitary mode of queer theory. In the landmark “Thinking Sex,” she writes, “it is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to reflect more accurately their separate social existence. This goes against the grain of much contemporary feminist thought, which treats sexuality as a derivation of gender” (170). It is this legacy that white queer theory is heir to, which Hames-García targets as “politically suspicious,” and argues for its denial of the ontological priority of the legacy of race and colonialism for any work on sexuality. Since the essay first appeared in 2001, however, Hames-García’s call for intersectional approaches to queer studies has been answered. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to see work on sexuality that does *not* take into account gender, race, nationality, and migration status, given the renewed focus and energy on intersectional analysis in the mode of postpositive realism, in ethnographically oriented queer work, and queer of color critique. The second target of Hames-García’s critique seems to be these contemporary efforts, which, to his mind, are precisely how the

study of sexuality ought to be conducted from a political, analytical, and historical perspective, though they are still “nothing new” if one follows his alternative genealogy to find precursors to *Gay Latino Studies* and the *Black Queer Studies* anthology.²⁶

But it is the explicit *political* side to Hames-García’s argument that I would like to focus on, in order to situate my project as intervening in this contested field of discourse about the genealogical and ideological pressures brought to bear on work dealing with identity and representation. Mohanty makes explicit his commitment to a left-progressive vision of diversity (what was called multiculturalism in the 1990s) and makes this standpoint one of “epistemic privilege.” That is to say, Mohanty argues that the firsthand experience of marginalization (e.g., driving while Black) constitutes greater epistemic access to the objective reality of social experience. By so doing, Mohanty reverses the entrenched interests of white plutocratic society, which deny—ontologically, and otherwise—the preponderance, or even existence, of the marginalization of social or structural “minorities,” including women. To combat social privilege, in a sense, Mohanty argues for privileging the epistemic kind. So we come to see the world according to Alice and her consciousness-raising group, but not according to her father or husband, if they reveal themselves to be sexist, as in Mohanty’s example. While Mohanty thus argues for a political commitment on behalf of the social underdog, Hames-García, on the other hand, argues for a total methodological program along these lines.

Let us remember the first few lines of Sedgwick’s *Epistemology*. This landmark text proposes that

an understanding of *virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance* to the degree that it does not

incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition; and ... the appropriate place for that critical analysis to begin is from the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory. (1; emphasis added)

And let us compare this call to arms for a radical queer critique with Hames-García's, made over ten years later. Hames-García writes that "[Q]ueer theorists tend to understand the history of sexuality from within a Eurocentric frame. 'Modern sexuality' ... emerges in the eighteenth or nineteenth century alongside the emergence of industrial capitalism, liberalism, and the nation-state" (40). "By contrast," he argues,

for scholars studying race and sexuality modern sexuality emerges alongside the violence of European colonialism and indigenous resistance in the sixteenth century, the transatlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century, the imperialist wars and expansion of Europe and its former settler colonies in the Americas, southern Africa, and the Pacific in the nineteenth century, and the waves of postcolonial independence in the twentieth century. Sexuality looks dramatically different emerging from the first, Eurocentric narrative than from the second narrative. (40)

While not as sweeping as Sedgwick's opening salvo in *Epistemology*, which effectively makes *any* cultural critique "not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance" if it does not "incorporate" an analysis of modern sexuality, Hames-García's remarks also engage in splitting (to use a psychoanalytic term). That is to say, a complex entity, such as "modern sexuality," is split in two diametrically opposed "narratives": one, a "Eurocentric narrative," and the other originating in the work of "scholars working on race and sexuality." The latter camp is otherwise not qualified ideologically—there is no evaluative cognate to the qualifier "Eurocentric"; the opposite worldview is only "the second narrative." It is only by induction, from the history that Hames-García capitulates in his series, that tells the reader that this second narrative constitutes a postcolonial understanding of the mutual imbrication of "race and sexuality." And, further, the passage implies the greater purchase

this postcolonial understanding of modern sexuality has in comparison to the Eurocentric narrative, on what seem to be historical, political, and, by implication, epistemological grounds. To understand the history of sexuality as Sedgwick does, as Foucault does, and as other “queer theorists” do, this passage implies, means that the history of colonization is ontologically denied (to use Hames-García’s term for his broad claim). Such theorists seem to share “an implicit commitment to maintaining the centrality of whiteness” (28). Whose side are you on? The good guys, or the bad guys? Such a binaristic frame recapitulates Sedgwick’s own, where, as noted briefly above, in the second sentence of her field-creating book, she claims a similarly sweeping division of the world: either you are integrating “modern homo/heterosexual definition” into your “understanding of modern Western culture,” or said understanding is “damaged in its central substance.” Hames-García’s claim is equally Manichean. Either the critic understands “modern sexuality” as originating with European colonialism, or s/he ignores this colonial history and produces “queer theory” that lacks any grasp of the “mutually constitutive” history of “class, gender, race, and sexuality” (40).

This is an all-or-nothing approach to queer cultural theory, as I show juxtaposing *Epistemology* and “Queer Theory Revisited”: one of the founding texts of queer theory and one of its strongest critiques share a fundamentalist zeal. Their binaristic frame of reference—either you understand “modern Western culture” as defined by “homo-/heterosexual[ity],” or your understanding is “damaged in its central substance.” Either your narrative integrates (“incorporates”?) the dimensions of “class, gender, race, and sexuality” as “mutually constitutive,” because they have “given shape to one another over

many centuries” (Hames-García 40), or your understanding is, indeed, “damaged in its central substance,” because it is Eurocentric, evinces an “implicit commitment to maintaining the centrality of whiteness,” or both. An important question I have for this encounter is, to what extent do these two criticisms amount to the same thing?

As they seem to for Hames-García, who closes his argument by writing unequivocally that “modern gay and lesbian identities began to emerge in resistance to homophobia in the twentieth century in Europe and North America, but the sexual and gender relations of heterosexuality and homosexuality that gave birth to them arose as part of the colonial/modern gender system” (42). Such an understanding of the history of modern sexuality and what he calls (after María Lugones)²⁷ the “colonial/modern gender system” seems to demand two related ideological injunctions: One, to pay obeisance to “past and ongoing efforts to integrate considerations of class, gender, race, and sexuality, the origins of which predate queer theory” (42). And two, to work within this intersectional understanding of sexuality as fully implicated in, and coextensive with, the history of Western imperialism. As he writes by way of closing: “many queer theorists have consistently resisted the consequences of a truly substantive, thorough, and ongoing engagement with theories that are centrally concerned with race and class from the other side of a deep epistemological divide” (42). This “deep epistemological divide” signals warring ways of doing queer studies, one represented by queer of color critique. The epistemological frame of a “colonial/modern gender system” is thus the (only, best) way to do a proper history of “modern sexuality”: “Those of us who share [an] interest in radical social transformation would do well to look to convergences of women of color feminisms,

transnational feminisms, and anticolonial theorists” (42). But what if critics do not want to go in their direction? Then they may not share an “interest in radical social transformation”; they may be regarded with “suspicion as to their political motivations” (28).

IV: Splitting the Difference

Janet Halley, in *Split Decisions*, defines the political and theoretical desire for convergence across multiple strands of identity analysis—as in the example of “women of color feminisms, transnational feminisms, and anticolonial theorists”—as, appropriately enough, convergentist. Intersectionality theories are “convergentist” insofar as they accept only an integrated approach to the study of “class, gender, race, and sexuality”—histories that contemporary queer of color theorists like Hames-García see as “mutually constitutive” and, *therefore*, must be understood as such, and analytically interwoven. The convergentist approach to theorization is prescriptive, in Halley’s terms, because it views unitary analysis (such as Sedgwick’s, of modern “homo/heterosexual definition,” or Rubin’s, of sexuality outside the framework of feminism) as “suspicious ... political[ly],” as Hames-García ominously warns. Convergence theorists see mainstream queer theory and its genealogy as “damaged in [its] central substance,” because it has failed to integrate “class, gender, race, and sexuality” beyond mere “tokenism” (43)—the dreaded *et cetera* once again.

Halley’s *Split Decisions* has come under fire for arguing the unthinkable: the subtitle of her book is *How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*. But the series of arguments is compelling, not least for the way in which Halley characterizes dueling approaches to theory, which she calls descriptive or prescriptive. Her nomenclature is useful, insofar as it

puts into context much of the work I have gone over in this Introduction so far—the recent history of critical ideas in queer studies and in the study of minority subjectivity and identity-based social activism and engaged scholarship. Her argument, in brief, is that the way feminist inquiry and praxis have evolved in the U.S. in the last generation or so necessitates a change in some of the basic presuppositions for continuing work in critical areas of thought that may, or may not be, fully consistent with these presuppositions. She boils down the premises of contemporary U.S. feminist thought to three “minima,” which are, in her shorthand notation, *m/f*, *m>f*, and *carrying a brief for f*. In lay terms, these minimal conditions for any project to carry the banner of feminism, no matter how lightly, are, respectively: “a distinction between some m and something f; a commitment to be a theory about, and a practice about, the subordination of f to m; and a commitment to work against that subordination on behalf of f” (4–5). Halley adds two other contemporary “commitments” that “feminism” holds dear, which her argument serves to interrogate. The second commitment is “the deeply held but entirely dispensable view that feminism is an indispensable element, if not the overarching structure, of any adequate theory of sexuality, gender, m/f, and associated matters” (5). And the third *sine qua non* of contemporary U.S. feminism, according to Halley, is

a series of interconnected assumptions that almost all feminists share with almost all left-of-center theorists of sexuality [she studies in her book]: that one theory is better than many; that integrating alternative theories together is the goal of our work; that reality must come fully into line with, be engulfed by, theory; that theory will tell us all the crucial things we *need* to know about moral value and emancipation. (5)

This third series is what Halley calls “the prescriptive deployment of theory” (Ibid). And the “consequence” of thinking along these lines, for feminist inquiry as well as “left-of-

center theorists of sexuality”—including Hames-García, and the generative traditions of queer of color critique—is, according to Halley, “a pervasive consensus that any particular theory is a compact, dense mass of valid description, correct normative judgment, and indispensable emancipatory aspiration” (Ibid).

What is the problem with such aspiration? One particular issue that arises from this set of ideological and epistemological commitments, according to Halley, is the pressure to converge: the idea that “one theory is better than many,” and all of the conceptual consequences that arise from this premise. As we have seen with Hames-García, the notion of convergence is, in practice, prescriptive, in Halley’s terms. Let us recall his warning about the “suspicion as to the political motivations” of theories, like Sedgwick’s and Rubin’s, that split the analysis of sexuality from the study of gender or race. This prescriptive “convergentist” approach, whose desire is that accounts of difference always integrate various forms of social inequality, exercises moral force against theories that diverge, instead of converge. As we have seen, these are theories such as Rubin’s, which study the oppression of sexual minorities by insisting on diverging from core feminist presuppositions, at least temporarily (*m/f*, *m>f*, and *carrying a brief for f*, in Halley’s terms).²⁸ What is more, this morally prescriptive force against divergentist approaches, she claims, serves to undermine theoretical offshoots of feminism, such as—indeed—queer theory, which have sought to understand other facets of oppression. A key example is the widening of the *m/f* binary to the transgender umbrella, which was arguably *Gender Trouble*’s key intervention. As Halley recounts, Butler took some flak for departing from the premise that women were the constitutive subject of feminism (136–50, and *passim*).

Butler's book, among other critiques, argued that such ideology reinforced our culture's construction of hetero-binary gender norms and the institution of compulsory heterosexuality, in its unerring belief in the foundational importance of a world divided into *m/f* and of feminism's *carrying a brief for f* (what Halley also calls sexual-subordination theory).

But there are many other schools and movements that, to borrow Halley's cheeky style, Took a Break from Feminism. Not only Foucault and other sexuality theorists (as noted above), but also the women-of-color and Third World feminists that Hames-García counts among those occluded by Foucauldian queer theory. There is a paradox here, insofar as these two camps seem to diverge from feminism as it was articulated in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s, but in opposite directions: one camp sought to converge by, in addition to analyzing gender, they brought race, class, and sexuality into the conversation.²⁹ The "other" side, to remain within Halley's feminist-schism paradigm, adopted Foucault and other poststructuralist understandings of sexuality, and Took a Break from sexual-subordination theory to focus on a postmodern theory of sexuality.³⁰ This unwitting series of "split decisions," or moments and modes of uncoordinated convergence and divergence—paradoxical plots of political and philosophical differences and consistencies—demonstrates the complexity of the social problems these theories seek to address. Moreover, the fact that the outcomes of some convergence theories are split decisions—as in prioritizing race/ethnicity over sexuality, as we see in much queer of color critique—undermines the convergence theorist's moral drive toward creating, articulating, and advocating for a Theory of Everything. Such intersectional approaches presume that there

is a complex, multifactorial “theory [that] will tell us all the crucial things we need to know about moral value and emancipation,” in Halley’s terms (5). As we saw with Hames-García, there is an uncomfortable moralism inherent in such a stance—warning that work that deals with one form of inequality in isolation arouses “suspicion as to [its] political implications.” Halley, however, adds that this convergentist drive can also become incoherent, since the priorities are not necessarily consistent with a pure analytical “integration” (Hames-García’s word).

Before turning to my own divergentist project on the misfit minority in the next section, I want to end this with a brief demonstration and visual representation of the split decisions borne even by intersectional, convergentist approaches.³¹ Halley’s most persuasive example of the unwitting divergence and internal schism that integration theories sometimes produce is The Combahee River Collective’s “A Black Feminist Statement” (Halley 82–90). Halley groups the latter under the umbrella category of “hybrid feminists,” including socialist feminism, antiracist, and postcolonial (81). Yet, disappointingly, she makes short shrift of women-of-color feminism, only giving due airtime to *Combahee* and Spivak’s work in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Halley, therefore, herself is vulnerable to the charge of whitewashing feminism that she documents in such “hybrid” collectives and politics.³²

Despite her blindspots with regard to women-of-color feminism, Halley demonstrates that divergence is sometimes inevitable when different modes of identification intersect. Her “classic” example involves the split decisions that occur when antiracist work, for instance, diverges from women’s advocacy—as in the case of Anita Hill

and Clarence Thomas in the 1990s. Halley's point in raising this issue of divergence is that not all forms of identity operate the same way (no facile analogies). Some cultural affiliations and commitments trump other ones, and when they seem irreconcilable, choices have to be made. Halley's argument is that these choices are not only inevitable, but necessary, since, to her, theories of resistance and oppression are contingent on their ability to make sense of the world—they ought not be deployed prescriptively, as a categorical imperative, or an impediment to making split decisions (since these happen anyway). As she admits, “my desire is ... a practice, of being in the problem, not being in the theory” (7).

This project departs from this notion of split decisions, perhaps another word for the double exile that shapes, to greater or lesser extent, the misfit minority sensibility. In other words, while Halley's argument stages the wavering (she uses the term “flicker”) between narratives of identity at the level of social movements and theoretical interventions, this project looks at the smaller-scale substrate of such movements and interventions.

Individual negotiations of split decisions, double- or triple-consciousness, that are everywhere but occluded because of the agony (Halley 6) caused by such flickering commitments to one's body, soul, family, and community. At the level of U.S. feminism, Halley tracks these moments of agony, this struggle for the soul of feminism, the warring camps (say, the 1980s' feminist sex wars), and argues for how vibrant these moments and affects are. In terms that equally may apply to the split between established queer theory and queer of color critique, such splits are “highly controversial, painful, and life-changing for those involved in making them” (Halley 6). But, Halley argues, these split decisions “should also be remembered for the sheer joy that they made possible” (Ibid). The misfit

minority as a sensibility of persistent, if not permanent, internal split decisions, depicts an agonizing representation of political disidentification, complicity, and assimilation—even of self-hatred, antisociality, self-sabotage, and lack of self-interest. Where is the joy in that?

V: Misfit Minorities

In Halley's terms, my conception of the doubly exiled misfit is a weak convergence theory, cutting across multiple modes of feeling "minor."³³ But it is also a strongly divergentist project, which insists on the value of nonconformity within minoritarian discourses, as it comprehends the nonconformity of the literary authors that compose my study. The problem of the misfit minority lies precisely in the uneven fit between expectations of representation, and the dialectical realities of resistance and assimilation. If we too easily turn away from examples of complicity—as in assimilationist minority writers, such as Richard Rodriguez, to cite a well-known Latino example³⁴—we lose the opportunity to further examine our own conceptions of proper political subjects—both what properties they share, and exhibit. Misfit minority texts challenge our assumptions of what counts as legitimate resistance. They are doubly exiled from majority culture and minoritarian community and tradition, and belonging to neither—to which Thurman's protagonist, seen as an outsider to the Harlem Renaissance due to her darker skin color, strongly attests. The strongest cases of this literary sensibility perversely fail to *represent*—in the collective sense of uplift and respectability, and the subjective sense of wallowing in self-loathing and other toxic interpretations of cultural (dis-) identification.³⁵ These accounts of double exile do ambiguous political work, against respectability, and against

uplift, work easily criticized as bespeaking social privilege. Misfit minorities may at times be quite privileged in their respective ironies of double exile—as we see with Rhys, and her relatively privileged Creole caste status in Dominica, despite her downtrodden experiences in Europe as a “girl” from “the island.” As with the sirens’ song that Odysseus refuses to hear in order to continue his journey, misfit minority voices tempt us to listen. If we do listen to what they’re saying, will we then drown? Or is there the possibility of another journey, another way back home? Asks Rhys’ narrator in the *Voyage in the Dark*: “[H]ow do you know what it’s like to try to speak from under water when you’re drowned?”³⁶

This study as a whole looks at literary writers engaged in narratives of disidentification from normative, idealized forms of minoritarian identity, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality. These authors are all diasporic in terms of their migrations across the U.S. or the Continent, or, in the case of Christopher Isherwood, across the Atlantic. They are all modernists but also, varyingly, representative of the voices of postcoloniality and Englishness, hybrid nationality and immigration status, racial and ethnic identity, sexuality, and gender. As modernists and minoritarian in their cultural locations—in the case of Rhys, her minoritarian subject-position as a postcolonial woman writer indicates the importance of intersectionality as well as non-statistical minoritarian status of women. Within the bounds of this study, these four authors belong to a minor canon of twentieth-century literature that I analyze under the thematic rubric of the misfit minority. Their narratives depict subjects and scenes that question the value of social solidarity, which these texts view as coming at the expense of the individual, and even the value of successful or triumphant personhood altogether.

In the first chapter, I focus on the misfit sensibility of Harlem Renaissance provocateur, Wallace Thurman, and his first novel, *The Blacker the Berry ... A Novel of Negro Life* (1929). *The Blacker the Berry* documents in literary-narrative terms the condition of double exile that is central to this project, a condition encapsulated by what the narrator calls the *tragedy* of Thurman's protagonist, Emma Lou Morgan, who is ostracized for being "too Black" even by her own family and the Harlem subculture of the Renaissance.³⁷ In his depictions of urban working-class sexuality and Black middle-class color prejudice, Thurman implicitly challenges the norms of the New Negro and the bourgeois notions of respectability and uplifting the race. Instead, he traces the contours of internal racism and self-abnegation, implicitly framing the novel around the rhetorical question of the double exile: *What happens when you are abandoned by your own kind?*

Thurman, along with the other authors in this study—Jean Rhys, Christopher Isherwood, and Kazuo Ishiguro—turn to the margins of subjective life, what's swept away in the optimism of collective wish fulfillment. Their fictions present us with cultural narratives that explore negative scenes and objects of living that seem detached from collective investments in political will. Rather than uplift, these narratives downshift, or make lateral shifts, and represent modes of exile beyond the minority's experience in majority culture. They perversely focus on who is left behind, and defy social norms of respectability, as Thurman does in deliberately writing a story on prostitution for the inaugural issue of *Fire!!* ("Cordelia the Crude").³⁸ By narrating scenes of escape from respectable life, and of internal exile, these authors also narrate escapes from the constraints of collective identity, from the symbolic or cultural self that is attached to community-

building narratives of aspiration. These novels resist projecting resilient figures of collective will; their cultural dissidence is unredeemed.

My overall study, thus, argues for the conceptual and political significance of the misfit minority as an under-explored sensibility, perhaps even a structurally common feature of any consolidated identity or community.³⁹ The misfit's double exile sharply contrasts the normative representations that make us feel good. Thurman decries the minority writer's implicit function of advancing collective uplift as the illusory "rosy castles" of minoritarian assimilation, tales of the "parlor" rather than the "pantry."⁴⁰ *The Blacker the Berry* exemplifies the affective realism of Thurman's avant-garde critique of what he considered the propagandistic side to the Harlem Renaissance. Thurman chose instead to represent intraracial prejudice and self-abandonment.

The importance of this site of literary resistance to the politics of identity (in Thurman's case, Alain Locke's New Negro and W. E. B. Du Bois' Talented Tenth) is its being situated in minoritarian subjects, thus conveying legitimate cultural dissidence from what Thurman called "pigeon-holed" forms of identity and community.⁴¹ Thurman's refusals to reduce his point of view to the level of "race man," or even to align his aesthetic to Locke's New Negro program of Black bourgeois respectability, is instructive in this regard, and contributes to a revision of the New Negro movement as complex and fragmented as the community it sought to consolidate. Thurman carved out a space of possibility outside the contours of aesthetic respectability that threatened to usurp the radical potential of the Renaissance.

My second chapter, on Jean Rhys, revisits the early fiction, specifically *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and views it through the lens of Rhys' subversion of gender conformity, as well as her fiction's penchant for appropriating misfit identifications (or misidentifications) across racial and class boundaries. The white Creole protagonist, Anna Morgan, wants to be "Black," bespeaking a politically noxious cross-cultural identification that reads as neocolonialist appropriation. Yet, as a young woman "from the island" in London, Morgan is herself oppressively sexualized and racialized. She adopts a radically passive and dependent personality, almost as self-defense, specifically with regard to her rich, older English lover, whose eventual abandonment is her undoing. In brief, Morgan disobeys the class and racial codes of modern English femininity, unable to occupy the bourgeois vision of female propriety, nor the potential for liberation as a self-made (new) woman. Both cultural paradigms populate the novel; but Anna Morgan remains a "total misfit," like Emma Lou Morgan in Thurman's novel. She is a figure for what Rhys famously called "inferior being," and elsewhere feeling like "a doormat in a world of boots." *Voyage in the Dark*'s politically challenging, misfit sensibility of gender subversion and racial appropriation contrasts the more readily legible oppositional politics of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). This schism in the early and late fiction illustrates a myth of Rhys as a postcolonial woman writer, versus the alienated visions of her early fictions, which exemplify deracinated misfit figures.

Indeed, Rhys is known to have worn the mask of blackface in her later short story, "Let Them Call It Jazz."⁴² The first-person short story, told from the point of view of Selina Davis, tells the story of a Black protagonist from Martinique. Rhys' appropriation of

blackness in this story is notable only for being a stronger version of Anna Morgan's "wanting to be Black" in *Voyage in the Dark*. Yet, the impulse of my project is to delve into the cross-identifications that Rhys represents, in telling an autobiographical story about being briefly imprisoned in Holloway, an English jail, for disorderly conduct. Rhys' identification with blackness is repugnant, and politically fraught, but bears examination, rather than (too easy) judgment.

In this example of a misfit appropriation of another's social belonging, Rhys clearly dramatizes this very issue, where the title of the story—"let them call it jazz"—recurs in the final event in the narrative. Selina, put in jail partly because she was too noisy (from the racist point of view of her bourgeois English neighbors), falls into a funk while in jail. Until she hears another inmate sing the jailhouse song, the Holloway song: "I don't hear the words—only the music" (64). Surprised even at herself, Selina then starts to sing again. She becomes more vibrant, and is quickly released. She continues to whistle the tune—the Holloway song that she overheard, and made her own—and is later overheard by a man, who asks to hear it again. Selina "whistle[s] it again (I never sing now)" (67).⁴³ And the musician then "plays the tune, jazzing it up" (Ibid). Selina says

"No, not like that," but everybody else say the way he do it is first class. Well I think no more of this till I get a letter from him telling me he has sold the song and as I was quite a help he encloses five pounds with thanks.

I read the letter and I could cry. *For after all, that song was all I had. I don't belong nowhere really, and I haven't money to buy my way to belonging. I don't want to either....*

Now I've let them play it [the song] wrong, and it will go from me like all the other songs—like everything. Nothing left for me at all.

But then I tell myself all this is foolishness. Even if they played it on trumpets, even if they played it just right, like I wanted—no walls would fall so soon. "So let them call it jazz," I think, and let them play it wrong. That won't make no difference to the song I heard. (67; emphasis added)

This appropriation is simple on the surface, especially given the intertextual interference of the author's cultural location. But in this parable, Selina Davis overhears a song from a prisoner, takes it, and thinks, " 'One day I hear that song on trumpets and these walls will fall and rest.' " (64). The series of cultural appropriations does not begin nor end with her: the song is jazzed up—with the connotations of American Black culture that that word represents, inescapable in this author's context—and its profits stolen from her. As, many say, Rhys stole the voice of the Black Caribbean, and enjoyed the profits of being a white Creole, an emissary that looked much like Helen of Troy—Rhys has been called "the Helen of our wars."⁴⁴ So let them call it appropriation of jazz, then. Let us/them convict the appropriation, and move right along. We have an odyssey to complete, an itinerary by which to abide. What if we suspend our attachment to the (obvious) political problems posed by such a text, and the author of such text, and begin to ponder the all-too-neglected facets of reality and cultural identification, of disturbing wishes and dreams, shared by misfit minorities all-too-privileged to embrace, like Rhys herself? What if we tempt Rhys to play her song, knowing full well we risk being shipwrecked, yet another casualty of the "wars" of identity-politics? Will we drown, or will we find something in that thick and greasy morass. What to do about the longing to repeat and recuperate sadness, even the other's sadness, the desire to maintain a toxic attachment to a self that feels as if she "don't belong nowhere really, and [hasn't] money to buy [her] way to belonging"? What if the affects are internalized racism, what then? Surely we plug up our ears and remain tightly fastened, our ship must continue to sail (away). But the siren song remains, and we can still somewhat hear them, though we choose to pay them no mind. Just because

we ignore this image of Rhys, does not mean it goes away. Just because we ignore this image of Thurman, does not mean he goes away.

This is my understanding of the realism in postpositive studies of minority feelings and politics. It is the need to work through this gesture—let them call it jazz—because too little work in minority studies allows itself the privilege to suspend rigid attachments to correct politics.

My third chapter, on Christopher Isherwood, reads *A Single Man* (1964) for the importance of an aesthetic sensibility of self-divesting impersonality that renders Isherwood's novel more queer than gay, in its non-uplifting representation of “single” or solitary subjectivity mediated by impersonal distance and negative affects.⁴⁵ Isherwood's vision of minoritarian subjectivity is one radically distant from a Stonewall model of visibility and uplift, distant from contemporary norms of minoritarian identity and the politics of positive personhood. Rather, *A Single Man* stages non-self-possessed personhood and impersonal relations to the other as a priority of an ethical subjectivity. That this subjectivity is also a minoritarian subject shows the ambivalence Isherwood effected in his aesthetic within fictional representational, one quite different from the positive political will of his own post-Stonewall autobiographical projects. In this sense, Isherwood's *Single Man* narrates the self-abandonment of a queer subject. Thurman's novel, on the other hand, focuses on originary social abandonment and its entailments in the protagonist figure of Emma Lou Morgan, whose father is dark-skinned and whose mother is lighter-colored, but who is raised in mostly white Boise, Idaho, by her maternal family, her father exiled by the family's color prejudice, as Emma Lou will be herself.

In my fourth chapter, on Kazuo Ishiguro and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), I read the speculative novel as, paradoxically, a literalized metaphor for subalternity as exploited labor. This figure does not rebel. Here, misfits to the rest of society fit in all too well, for they are human clones engineered to become organ donors. As bare lives pressed to serve human lives, the clones literalize the condition of subalternity. This novel represents what an entire subculture of misfit minorities would be like: all weakly passive, self-deceiving about their shared destiny—“vulnerable,” in the novel’s words. Ishiguro’s novel forces us to question the ethical and political value of the human spirit, the anthropocentric ideals of autonomy and uniqueness to which the clones are sacrificed. Fittingly, *Never Let Me Go* represents an alternative set of ideals, of derivative art, doomed fellowship, imperfect attachments, and vulnerability facing domination.

VI. Conclusion

Overall, this study of the misfit minority as a cultural sensibility of literary modernity, uses the theoretical framework of queer studies, and relying on the renewed epistemic foundation of the evidence of experience, as developed in postpositive realism studies of minority consciousness. This is a sensibility that in many ways borrows all the hallmarks of antisocial queer studies, showcasing the importance of a re-convergence, “after queer,” between establishmentarian queer theory and queer of color critique and the future of minority studies. These affects, wrongly only associated with whiteness, masculinity, and social hegemony, I argue, are also the weapons of the weak, of the misfits within minoritarian groupings who do not fit in, whose tongues remain tied. This is one way that

the nonconformist minority figure experiences exile—antisociality in its starkest form—as a way of life. Another is a penchant for keeping one’s own at a remove—cultivating an impersonal subjectivity. Easily read as self-alienation, as the split subject of double consciousness, the misfit minority is the figure in the narrative for whom there is no resolution to this internal split decision. In the strongest cases in my study, there is no vision of reunion, collective transcendence, of sustained uplift. Instead, we remain in the affective world of attachment to queer feelings of shame, self-loathing, and (yes) even disgust at one’s identification with the abjected minority body, one’s own body, the site of Emma Lou Morgan’s “tragedy.” Isherwood’s turn to a spiritualized version of this pre-Stonewall queer structure of feeling, and his calling it a question of “nonconformists” and of a “minority-sisterhood” rather than gay identity, illustrates the cross-cutting significance of this misfit ethical self-elaboration. Isherwood shows, after decades spent constructing the “gay male tribe” before gay liberation as such, that the recourse to a recessive ethos of ascetic self-divestiture is an under-acknowledged and under-theorized dimension of minoritarian existence.

I have tried to demonstrate how and why the misfit minority conceptual framework allows us to ask questions about the direction of queer studies, in particular, but also about the direction of left-progressive scholarship on multiple kinds of oppression. My critique of the new intersectionality takes up these questions, which seem to vex generation after generation of feminist, and now queer, scholarship—now that queer scholarship has undergone generational change. My project intervenes most forcefully in the current ideological and, in a sense, generational division of queer studies today. This division is

between scholars working within an intersectional realist framework, and “establishment-arian” queer theory.⁴⁶ Yet, this division reveals a binary framework: either identity-affirming, employing an intersectional feminist framework, and critical of queer theory’s insights—such as the antisocial thesis, the importance of shame as a constitutive affect, and the radical critique of personhood and transformations of kinship. Or, identity-dissolving, and asserting dominion over all notions of the abject—queer at its most expansive, but also most imperialistic, maintaining an under-acknowledged identification with the privileges of whiteness, masculinity, and bourgeois sophistication.

The misfit minority frame allows us to absorb the best of queer theory’s intentions with those of feminist-inspired queer of color critique. Antisociality and double exile is not the property of that queer form of privilege, nor is queerness the only mode of double exile that is culturally imaginable. And, at a grander scale, this project calls into question broad swaths of identity-political work. While I note the usefulness of what Halley reductively terms a prescriptive approach to theory (where ideology trumps epistemology), my study also resists the logic of authenticity in late-twentieth-century minority discourse.

Ultimately, the misfit minority is a sensibility in the authors and in the literature that I study, but it is also the sensibility of my own theoretical commitment, tuning in to the chords of double exile that resonate in varied traditions of minoritarian representation.

NOTES

¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *In Other Worlds: Essays In Cultural Politics* (1985; New York: Routledge, 1988), 197–221, 211.

² Queer theory, inaugurated in the late 1980s and early 1990s (though this genealogy is also part of the contentious debate between queer theory's traditionalists and postpositive queer-of-color critics), has evolved into the less theoretically oriented queer studies. Even so, the controversies surrounding the subject and agent of queer theoretical work in the humanities has gotten ugly. See, for instance, this bon mot, by David L. Eng (with Halberstam and Muñoz): "Much of queer theory nowadays sounds like a metanarrative about the domestic affairs of white homosexuals." In Eng (with Halberstam and Muñoz), "Introduction: What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" Special Issue of *Social Text* 84–85 (2005): 1–17, 12. Further page references embedded parenthetically.

³ Janet Halley, *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Further references to Halley embedded parenthetically.

⁴ Miss Kilman is the abjected, mannish lesbian figure in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925; New York: Harcourt Brace, 1990).

⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). Further references embedded parenthetically.

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "How To Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys," in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 154–64. Orig. appeared in *Social Text* 29 (1991): 18–27.

⁷ *Tongues Untied*. 1989. Dir. Marlon Riggs (Culver City, CA: Strand Releasing, 2008), DVD.

⁸ For more on ugly feelings and their relationship to minoritarian subject positions, see Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁹ My thanks to Marianne DeKoven for this insight.

¹⁰ The Future of Minority Studies Research Project is based in Cornell University, and is accessible online at fmsproject.cornell.edu. "Theoretical postmodernism" appears in Satya P. Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition," *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993): 41–80, 42. Further references to this article will be embedded parenthetically in the text as "Epistemic."

¹¹ One of these understandings is antiessentialism. Essentialism, of course, is the notion that there exist natural qualities or essences of an individual, or a social grouping based on one or more of these qualities, and that these essences persist outside of human history and conception: The essences are real. In the common narrative, the postmodern turn in the academy superseded the essentialist understanding of social identity; against this understanding arose antiessentialism. The social-constructivist or antiessentialist turn is associated with the rise of poststructuralism, or "theory" *tout court*, in the mid-1980s. In this history of ideas, there came a turning point. Spivak famously argued for a "strategic use of positivist essentialism," despite the postmodern suspicion of identity as neither fixed nor

natural, because of the political efficacy for identity-based movements of claiming access to a stable political subject as constituent (“Subaltern Studies” 202–11, 205). Judith Butler, faced with the same dilemma—how to have direct politics without a political subject in the age of postmodernity?—suggested “contingent foundations” in her essay “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism,’ ” which appeared in the section entitled “Feminist Responses to Theoretical Issues,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3–21. Neither of these approaches solves the issue of dissolving a subject of the political process (by postmodern antifoundationalism) while re-instating that vaporized subject through a back maneuver of political expediency. It is hard to square the circle. Postpositive realism does a better job of leaving aside the vehement antifoundationalism of postmodernist thought, while maintaining an antiessentialist stance qualified by a reliance on the epistemic privilege afforded to minority experiences to see the social better. See Michael Hames-García and Paula M. L. Moya, eds., *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

¹² Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983).

¹³ To be clear, I am detailing poststructuralist French theory not in the feminist vein of *écriture féminine*, as in the work of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva. Rather, I am following the more expansive sense of poststructuralism as a postmodern theory of signification and evaporation of the subject, rather than an essentialism of feminine sexual difference.

¹⁴ Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982), 13–22. Further references to Combahee refer to the edition used by Janet Halley, *Split Decisions*.

¹⁵ As Scott claims, “When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the *constructed nature of experience*, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured—about language (or discourse) and history—are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of *exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world*” (777; emphasis added). Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17.4 (1991): 773–97. This essay is widely anthologized. Further page references to Scott are to this edition, and are embedded parenthetically in the text.

¹⁶ Some of these publications fall under the aegis of the Future of Minority Studies Research Project, (www.fmsproject.cornell.edu/fms_publications.html), and include the aforementioned Moya and Hames-García, *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (2000); *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, ed. Linda Martín Alcoff, Michael Hames-García, Satya P. Mohanty, and Paula M. L. Moya (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and the aforementioned *Gay Latino Studies*. Further page references to each book

will include author and short title if needed, embedded parenthetically in the text.

References to individual essays in these collections will be cited separately on first mention.

¹⁷ Michael Hames-García, “Queer Theory Revisited,” in *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, 19–45. Further references to this essay embedded in the text.

¹⁸ Indeed, this rejection of poststructuralist queer theory (or pre-Foucauldian understandings of sexuality), and the return to paradigms deploying intersectional identity, is represented by the entire field of Queer of Color Critique, first envisioned by Roderick A. Fergusson in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). The works in this rich vein of queer of color critique, which returns to an intersectional feminist—identified tradition of identity politics, are consistent with the postpositive realist position. Other influential interventions include, in no particular order, Sharon Patricia Holland’s *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Robert Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man: Essays* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, Jr., eds., *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); and the aforementioned *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. This note could add many other works emanating from the early aughts to the present day, too numerous to count in this space: even a partial list would fill a page or more. Needless to say, an important finding about this shift in queer studies is the establishmentarian queer studies is becoming queer of color critique, even if it does not identify itself as such.

¹⁹ Paula Moya’s Introduction to *Reclaiming Identity* provides this background on Mohanty. See Paula M. L. Moya, “Introduction: Reclaiming Identity,” in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, ed. Moya and Michael Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 1–26, 11, 11n15. Further page references to Moya’s Introduction to this volume are embedded parenthetically.

²⁰ That is to say, Mohanty articulates his political inclinations and ideological affiliations, rather than assume the positivist objectivity of a “view from nowhere,” which he stresses is impossible. In this sense, Mohanty engages in an honest espousal of views that, while widely shared in cultural theory, normally remain implicit rather than explicit in the theoretical argument itself. The occlusion of such vested interests is what Amanda Anderson calls the “cryptonormativism” of postmodern critics (like Butler) who espouse similar political commitments to Mohanty, but whose theoretic allegiance to poststructuralism disallows the epistemic foundations of their left-multiculturalist politics (as we see in Butler’s own “contingent foundations” or Spivak’s “strategic essentialism”). See Amanda Anderson, “Cryptonormativism and Double Gestures: The Politics of Poststructuralism,” *Cultural Critique* 21 (1992): 63–95. See also Anderson’s *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²¹ Briefly, in order to account for Hames-García’s alternative to that genealogy, a brief recapitulation of the origin myth of queer theory and lesbian and gay studies would begin with the work of Foucault in *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*; Gayle Rubin’s “Thinking Sex”; other work in the late 1980s, and a slew of publication and conference activity beginning in 1990 with the appearance of Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An*

Introduction, tr. Robert Hurley (1978; New York: Vintage, 1990). Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Rubin, Gayle, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance. (London: Pandora, 1992), 267–93. Rpt. in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle A. Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1994). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Indeed, "Thinking Sex" is the first essay in that landmark Reader, which served to institutionalize the burgeoning field. Further references to these will be embedded, with author (and title if needed) and page number, parenthetically.

²² Heather Love uses this term ("lip service") in her own assessment of the issues related to the Gay Shame Conference and the resulting split between mainstream queer theory and queer of color critique, and between theoreticians and activists who felt their work was coopted by the conference proceedings. The conference, briefly, was criticized for its lack of ethnic diversity in the choice of presenters, the use of racially loaded and sexually explicit visuals of "brown bodies," and its failure to include queer activists (Gay Shame San Francisco). Cf. Heather Love, "Gay Shame Redux," unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, 12 October 2006, 11.

²³ Hames-García has note at the end of this statement, where he admits that Linda Garber made "a similar argument" in *Identity Poetics* (44n19). Linda Garber, *Identity Poetics: Race, Class, and the Lesbian-Feminist Roots of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). Any further references to Garber embedded parenthetically in the text.

²⁴ As Halley notes, Butler has always been careful to situate her theoretical interventions within the field of feminism. Of course, Butler does this even while arguing against the subject of feminism being automatically considered "female," which, to Butler, simply buys in to a binaristic thinking of gender as *only* male *or* female, disavowing trans, drag, and the general performativity of all genders, while also constraining feminism within the matrix of compulsory heterosexuality. For the term "compulsory heterosexuality," see Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Sexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, 227–54.

²⁵ Rubin has famously argued for analyzing sexuality outside the framework of feminist inquiry. Here is another salient formulation of her rationale: "Sex is a vector of oppression. The system of sexual oppression cuts across other modes of social inequality, sorting out individuals and groups according to its own intrinsic dynamics. It is not reducible to, or understandable in terms of, class, race, ethnicity, or gender" ("Thinking Sex" 160–61).

²⁶ Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez, eds., *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, eds., *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). First references to essays appearing in each text cited in full.

²⁷ María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22.1 (2007): 186–209.

²⁸ Gayle Rubin makes this point clear in "Thinking Sex," articulating (in Janet Halley's terms) her Break from Feminism, or a break from her earlier feminist essay on the

structures of heteropatriarchal kinship, “The Traffic in Women.” Rubin writes, “I am now arguing that it is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to reflect more accurately their separate social existence. This goes against the grain of much contemporary feminist thought, which treats sexuality as a derivation of gender” (170). Gayle S. Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance. (London: Pandora. 1992), 267–93. Rpt. in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle A. Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1994). See also Gayle S. Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–209. Janet Halley, *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Further references to Halley embedded parenthetically in the text.

²⁹ Halley notes the irony that such intersectional theories of hybrid feminists, such as the antiracist feminism of Combahee, unwittingly diverge, despite their will to converge multiple means of oppressive socialization, insofar as they suspend the single-identity politics of earlier (or Second Wave) feminisms. See Halley 82–90, esp. 84–86.

³⁰ Of course, as I show by elaborating on Michael Hames-García’s argument, dominant, Foucauldian, and antifoundationalist queer theories have always been vulnerable to the feminist, queer-feminist, and queer-of-color criticism that establishmentarian queer theory, in forgetting gender (and race, and class, *et cetera*), has perpetuated bourgeois white male hegemony. See, for example, Biddy Martin’s “Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias,” often-cited for its critique of non-feminist queer theory à la Sedgwick (and others, like Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani). Carolyn “Biddy” Martin, “Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias,” *Diacritics* 24.2–3 (1994): 104–21. Butler herself has been on both sides, a chief proponent of divergence from feminism (eschewing “gender” as sole site of analysis) while insisting on feminism as the conceptual framework for doing such immanent critique. See Halley on Butler, 136–50, 221–73.

³¹ Such as, but not limited to, Hames-García, who has sadly become my whipping boy, perhaps because I identify with his project and politics the most of the critics cited so far. Or also because he makes the critique of queer theory so well and so resonantly, that it is hard to either agree or disagree with it—the sign of an important critical intervention.

³² This last point is well made by D. Lynn O’Brien Hallstein, in a review of *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*, by Janet Halley. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 12.2 (2009): 329–32, 331. Further page references to Hallstein embedded parenthetically in the text.

³³ I use the term “minor” in the double sense of being a social minority, as well as a suite of ugly feelings that attend to the subject who belongs to that social minority. This dual tenor for the term “minor,” encompassing both an objective social location—race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, among others—and a subjective affective disposition (what I call a sensibility) should be understood whenever the term “minor” is enclosed quotation marks.

³⁴ Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982; New York: Bantam, 1983).

³⁵ For more on the potentially generative energies of failure, see J. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Halberstam associates the conception of queer with failure, in a way that parallels my conception of the misfit minority experience of double exile. Although my project goes beyond sexual minorities, and thus abides by a critique of queer theoretic work that believes itself to have a monopoly on outsiderdom, double exile, and, yes, failure. For more on the theme of disidentification in an archive of performance art by queers of color, see José Esteban Muñoz's landmark *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). My project differs from Muñoz, as from Halberstam's, in extending beyond queerness as sexual identity, but also insofar as misfit minorities are not necessarily—nor even usually—arbiters of oppositional politics. Quite the opposite, really: hence their radioactive effect, politically speaking. But ignoring these kinds of representations, I argue, is not the answer. They can help us understand much more than we do, about both the production of resistance at the individual level—mediated by fictional narrative—and the ugly feelings of minoritarian complicity with hegemony of various kinds.

³⁶ Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934; New York: Norton, 1982), 98. Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text.

³⁷ Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry ... A Novel of Negro Life* (1929; New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969).

³⁸ Wallace Thurman, "Cordelia the Crude," which is the first literary piece in the first and only issue of *Fire!!: A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists*, ed. Wallace Thurman (New York: The Fire!! Press, 1926): 5-6. Because the only surviving issues are collector's editions—most were unsold and placed in indefinite storage in a basement where, ironically, they perished in a fire—the magazine was reprinted in 1990, with an introduction by Richard Bruce Nugent and a retrospective commentary by Thomas H. Wirth.

³⁹ Michael Warner calls this feature the ethical residuum, what gets left over in the urge toward normalization. See *The Trouble With Normal* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

⁴⁰ Thurman writes: "Negroes in America feel certain that they must always appear in public butter side up, in order to keep from being trampled in the contemporary onward march. They feel as if they must always exhibit specimens from college rather than from the kindergarten, specimens from the parlor rather than from the pantry. They are in the process of being assimilated, and those elements within the race which are still too potent for easy assimilation must be hidden until they no longer exist." Wallace Thurman, "Negro Artists and the Negro," in *Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman* (218–21), 198 (Rpt. *New Republic* 52 [31 Aug. 1927]: 37–39.). Further page references embedded parenthetically in the text.

⁴¹ The phrase is found in "Fire Burns: A Department of Comment," Thurman's essay regarding the Harlem establishment's largely negative reception to Carl Van Vechten's sensational bestseller *Nigger Heaven*, which came out the same year as *Fire!!* (1926). "Fire Burns" closes the first and last issue of *Fire!!*, which Thurman edited. Regarding the black cognoscenti's desire for positive portrayals of black characters, Thurman writes, "Why Negroes imagine that any writer is going to write what Negroes think he ought to write

about them is too ridiculous to merit consideration. It would seem that they would shy away from being pigeon-holed so long have they been the rather lamentable victims of such a typically American practice” as racial stereotyping, as in Van Vechten’s novel (48).

⁴² Jean Rhys, “Let Them Call It Jazz,” in *Tigers Are Better-Looking* (1962; New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 47–67. Further page references embedded parenthetically in the text.

⁴³ The significance of Selina’s “never sing[ing] now” is too specific a point to belabor in this Introduction, but, briefly, her eschewing of her carefree singing is a sign of her traumatic learning the bourgeois English codes of decorum that govern the life of the neighborhood, as personified by her neighbors.

⁴⁴ Cf. Edward Kamau Braithwaite, “A Post-Crutionary [sic] Tale of the Helen of Our Wars,” *Wasafiri* 11.22 (1995): 69–78, in which he critiques Rhys’ position in the field of postcolonial studies as “the Helen of our wars,” or the cause of much conflict regarding who should be lionized and become the proper subject of postcolonial representation. Braithwaite thereby calling attention to Rhys’ cultural and symbolic role, as the acceptable white (Creole) face whom white critics glom on to, rather than privileging Black voices and faces by Black Caribbean authors.

⁴⁵ Christopher Isherwood, *A Single Man* (1964; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ This term is Hiram Pérez’s, made in an incisive essay, entitled “You Can Have My Brown Body Too,” which appeared in the landmark “What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?” Special Issue of *Social Text* 84–85 (2005): 171–92, 172. The fuller quote reads as follows: “[Q]ueer theorizing ... displace[d] identity politics with an ... ideal bourgeois subject [defined by] his imperial gaze, his universalism, and his claims to a race-neutral objectivity.... It is not surprising then to find buried underneath the boot of this establishmentarian anti-identity all sorts of dissident bodies” (172). Pérez’s is a particularly resonant example of many—including Jack Halberstam’s “Shame and White Masculinity,” in the same issue (219–34)—that also critiques the now-infamous proceedings of the 2003 Gay Shame Conference at the University of Michigan.

CHAPTER 1

Wallowing with “Wallie”: Wallace Thurman’s Pyrrhic Victory

She had continued to go down, down, down, until she had little respect for herself.
—Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*¹

[F]or Thurman, arguing against the older generation’s insistence on representational didacticism and idealism—for him, indistinguishable from the bourgeoisie’s obsessions with uplift and respectability—was the consuming passion of his life.
—Amritjit Singh²

Introduction

Although a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance, Wallace Thurman remains relatively obscure compared to his celebrated contemporaries, such as Langston Hughes or Zora Neale Hurston. Amritjit Singh and Daniel Scott, editors of the *Collected Writings*, admit that Thurman tended to “walk ... into dangerous racial and personal territory,” especially in his still-unpublished series of biographical essays and memoirs, *Aunt Hagar’s Children*.³ Thurman admits that it was “difficult and risky” to critique the norms of the African American literary and cultural establishment, as promulgated by influential figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois. For example, in “High, Low, Past, and Present: Review of *The Walls of Jericho*, *Quicksand*, and *Adventures of an African Slaver*,” published in his short-lived literary-cultural journal, *Harlem: A Forum of Negro Life*, Thurman lambastes Du Bois for criticizing the novel *The Walls of Jericho*, by Rudolph Fisher.⁴ First, Thurman cites Du Bois’ objections to *Jericho*: mainly, that Fisher avoids writing about “his own kind,” and

that the “glimpses of better class Negroes which he gives us are poor, ineffective make-believes” (qtd in *Collected Writings* 218). Thurman admits becoming “angry and incoherent” upon reading Du Bois’ review, calling such criticism “narrow and patronizing,” and evincing an ironically patronizing “concern” “for the reviewer himself”—i.e., Du Bois (219). Thurman adds:

Were he [Du Bois] a denizen of “Striver’s Row,” scuttling hard up the social ladder, with nothing more important to think about than making money and keeping a high yellow wife bleached out and marcelled, one would laugh at such nonsense and dismiss it from one’s mind. But Dr. Du Bois is not this. He is one of the outstanding Negroes of this or any other generation. He has served his race well; so well, in fact, that the artist in him has been stifled in order that the propagandist may thrive. No one will object to this being called noble and necessary sacrifice, but the days for such sacrifices are gone. The time has come now when the Negro artist can be his true self and pander to the stupidities of no one, either white or black. (*Collected Writings* 219)

In this searing critique, Thurman radically distinguishes his aestheticist philosophy of individual artistic freedom from the thrall of the race man’s “propagandist” posture, here signaled by Du Bois, which calls above all for an aesthetic policy of uplift, through the literary representation of black bourgeois characters, which ideologically advances the collective interests of a resurgent African American community. For Du Bois, the literary presentation of such characters signifies “a step upward from Van Vechten and McKay” (218)—that is, from the working-class and underworld elements fictionalized sensationally in Carl Van Vechten’s *Nigger Heaven* and Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* (among other works), works that Du Bois decried for their representations of the “worst” elements in metropolitan black life.⁵ By contrast, Thurman impugns the seemingly benign “propagandist” agenda of Du Bois as inimical to the artistic sensibility: the race man has replaced the literary writer (“the artist in him has been stifled in order that the

propagandist may thrive”). But this is not all. Thurman also criticizes the race man as hypocritical. In comparing Du Bois first to a “denizen of Striver’s Row,” Thurman lambastes the crass materialism and assimilationist drive of the black bourgeoisie. Hence, advancing an aesthetic of uplift is equated with “scuttling hard up the social ladder, with nothing more important to think about than making money and keeping a high yellow wife bleached out and marcelled.” Thurman thus calls out the social and literary-cultural values of Du Bois as being in collusion with racialized American bourgeois values (“pander[ing] to the stupidities” of both Black and white audiences) by marshaling the symbol of a “high yellow wife,” whose skin color is “bleached out” and hair is “marcelled,” as evidence of a paradoxically Eurocentric sensibility. The race man defends against the “primitive types” of “American Negro” imagery of McKay and Thurman, among others, who depicted the Harlem Vogue of numbers runners, “sweetback” men, and women of easy virtue such as Thurman’s own “Cordelia the Crude” (*Collected Writings* 199).⁶ The race man as race traitor: Thurman is nothing if not a caustic critic of the African American cultural elite, represented by Du Bois, Alain Locke, Charles S. Johnson, and others. Thurman was a significant figure of the Renaissance’s second generation, and he actively contributed to the generational schism—thereby focusing his own voice as a leader of this new generation—by writing jeremiads against the Black cultural elite and the “propagandistic” aesthetic agenda of elders such as Du Bois and Locke in *The New Negro* anthology.⁷

Thurman’s point regarding the hidden Eurocentrism and propagandistic vision of African-American cultural leadership is bolstered in another essay, “Negro Artists and the Negro.”⁸ In that essay, Thurman argues that the problem with the “bourgeois Negro”—

the race man who desires literary representations of a “refined” Black middle-class life, not the crass “primitive” elements depicted “when the Negro was in vogue”⁹—is that he “[fears] what his white compatriots think,” and

feels that he cannot afford to be attacked realistically by Negro artists who do not seem to have the “proper” sense of refinement or race pride. The American scene dictates that the American Negro must be what he ain’t! And despite what the minority intellectual and artistic group may say [and here we might note Thurman’s own coterie as the referent for this group] it really does seem more profitable for him to be what he ain’t, than for him to be what he is.

(*Collected Writings* 198)

Thurman thus evinced a radical stance toward the class elitism of establishment figures such as Du Bois and Locke, both of whom urged an uplifting or “propagandistic” stance in aesthetic representation, in order to advance the collective racial interests of the New Negro. The “American Negro,” for Thurman as well as for Hughes, in works such as his *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, encompassed urban color and “unrefined” elements.¹⁰ The contemporary critiques made by Du Bois and others regarding younger literary authors such as Thurman centered on the notion of uplift and evincing sufficient “race pride,” found wanting in Thurman, McKay, and Hughes, among others, because they depicted the “primitive” elements of Harlem life. Thurman sought to neutralize such critiques, as we see in these brief examples, by calling for an anti-propagandistic aesthetic of “realism” as an overriding artistic principle. Said principle sought to depict the “American Negro” “as he is” rather than advancing a propagandistic agenda about what the American Negro “must be,” which was precisely what Thurman thought “he” was not (“must be what he ain’t”). As Thurman writes in “Negro Artists and the Negro,” the “Negro artist ... will

receive little aid from his own people unless he spends his time spouting sociological jeremiads or exhausts his talent in building rosy castles around Negro society” (198).

It is the principled refusal to erect those “rosy castles around Negro society” that sets apart the second generation of Harlem Renaissance authors such as Thurman, who took it upon himself to write his own oppositional “jeremiads” against the “sociological” function of artistic production espoused by the New Negro establishment. This establishment’s cultural values coincided with bourgeois norms of respectability, decorum, and Eurocentric notions of race pride, or what types of literary representation convey an acceptable vision of one’s ethnic culture. On the same page, Thurman adds:

Negroes in America feel certain that they must always appear in public butter side up, in order to keep from being trampled in the contemporary onward march. They feel as if they must always exhibit specimens from college rather than from the kindergarten, specimens from the parlor rather than from the pantry. They are in the process of being assimilated, and those elements within the race which are still too potent for easy assimilation must be hidden until they no longer exist. (198)

Thurman, as evident from his critique of the New Negro’s bourgeois sensibility, championed an oppositional aesthetic principle, based on relative autonomy from what he termed “sociological problems or propaganda,” which as we have seen threatened to render invisible (or “hidden”) the “American Negro” as he was, in the “onward march” toward “assimilation” (“what he must be”). As we have seen, the imposition of this “propagandistic” and “sociological” burden on younger Black artists constitutes Thurman’s chief grievance against Locke’s New Negro program of cultural representation, as well as against Du Bois, whose interest in racial uplift was oriented toward a mainstream white audience, and whose bourgeois values of decorum drove this march toward respectability. As Thurman puts it, this was a march from the pantry to the parlor, and

from kindergarten to college. For Thurman, it was as important to depict the pantry, and the kindergarten, as it was to represent the “rosy castles” erected around (New) Negro *society*, whose elite status, it goes without saying, differed greatly from the mainstream of African American life in the early twentieth century. Hence Thurman’s call to depict the Negro “as he is,” not “as he must be.”

This chapter will focus on Thurman’s first novel, *The Blacker the Berry* (1929), and argue for the relevance and importance of Thurman’s anti-bourgeois, anti-uplift, and hence anti-normative aesthetic, what I consider his minoritarian aesthetic of negative affect, self-abnegation, and impersonality. Thurman’s noted contrariness, his negativity bordering on nihilism, is notable in his own self-characterization as “caviling” and in his critiques of his “own kind,” as noted above.¹¹ Thurman’s dissident vision sought aesthetic freedom and distance from the New Negro as a masculine, bourgeois, collective Black identity.

Thurman cultivated what I consider a doubly minoritarian aesthetic, defined in deliberate opposition to the aesthetic ideology of the New Negro as he and his contemporary cohort viewed it in the established figures of Alain Locke and Du Bois.¹² Such cultural opposition is what critics call a form of dissident identification or “disidentification.”¹³ Thurman’s work is not in Locke’s *New Negro* anthology (1925), signaling his belatedness to the movement, and his outsider status as a latecomer to the Harlem Vogue. His outsiderdom freshens Thurman’s eye and sharpens the critical edge of his first two novels, *The Blacker the Berry* and *Infants of the Spring* (1932), a satirical roman à clef of the Harlem Renaissance, as documents of a minoritarian outlook radically opposed to visions of collective uplift and the middle-class markers of New Negro identity.¹⁴ Thurman’s minoritarian outlook is

embodied and situated socio-economically, racially, regionally, and gendered. But Thurman's oeuvre also aims to present disidentification as much as identity conformity. As we will see, the protagonist in *Blacker the Berry* does not fit in among her Black college peers, for instance, despite their common class background, largely because of Emma Lou's darker skin and the reigning color-coded caste system at the university.

Indeed, Thurman's infamous negativity poses a direct challenge to prevailing notions of Black masculine identity and community uplift in his own time and ours. Thurman's aesthetic of negativity seems drawn from his social outsider status with regard to Harlem's cultural norms (and its norms of racial caste based on skin color); as West put it, "He hated Negro society, and since dark skins were never the fashion among Negro upper classes, the feeling was occasionally mutual" (79). He was a misfit within a newly forming New Negro artistic community, regarding the "newness" with a satirical gaze that spared least of all himself and his own artistic values and literary works. Thurman shows us an alternative form of cultural resistance to masculine bourgeois norms of productive personhood and collective projects of life building. His radical aesthetic informs an ulterior form of agency that dis-identifies from community norms and individual adherence to these norms.

This chapter draws on the reception history of *The Blacker the Berry*, much of it negative. My argument centers on the agency of negative affects in *The Blacker the Berry* by locating one, "lonesomeness," in the body of the fiction, and the second, "stupid" or "stupidity," in the body of an oft-cited contemporaneous review of the novel. Noted for his "pessimism and defeatism," in Daniel Walker's terms, for his acerbic negativity bordering

on nihilism, Thurman also had a fraught relation to the Afro-American community of his time and place. Dorothy West recalls the “mutual contempt” that Black “high society” and Thurman shared, a social structure of feeling that I argue is under-theorized as a formative influence on Thurman’s reception and on his minoritarian aesthetic as a whole.¹⁵ This chapter also draws on the autobiographical vein of Thurman criticism, and performs its own yoking of the autobiographical with the narratological; or, rather, my reading draws a picture of the correspondences and continuities in affect within the aesthetic order of the novel as well as outside it, in the critical opinions of Thurman and others during the Renaissance. The negative affectivity of the Harlem Renaissance in the late 1920s—especially after Thurman deliberately included themes of prostitution and bisexuality in *Fire!!*, which provoked the rebuke of Renaissance elders such as Locke and Johnson—renders this short period of cultural history incredibly charged from not only an aesthetic but from an affective point of view.¹⁶ This chapter thus focuses on a palpably negative novel, and a palpably negative author, and how critiques and reviews centering on either the one or the other, or both, responded in kind with negative affectivity. In the past, this consensus has made Thurman a minor figure and *The Blacker the Berry* an under-studied novel. My chapter analyzes this entire aesthetic and cultural complex, centering on a novel whose protagonist has a “racial complex,” and an author whom most critics tied to his protagonist as himself personifying the issue of racial inferiority that shadows—and, I argue, enriches—his difficult and affecting novel.

Thurman’s focus on the negative in his literary and critical productions, as well as the critical conception of the relative ‘failure’ of his finished works—in terms of Eurocentric

aesthetic values, as we will see below—are part of the reason he is to this day a minor figure of the Harlem Renaissance. Ironically, Thurman guided the second generation of Renaissance artists by editing influential journals such as *Fire!!* and *Harlem*. For this reason his literary legacy bears reexamination. More specifically, Thurman’s anti-uplift aesthetic challenged the established leaders of the New Negro movement. As Granville Ganter writes, the “moralistic case” against Thurman, based on Thurman’s refusal to “celebrate” his community, rather than satirize or critique it, was a strategy originating with Du Bois, which defines the contours of Harlem Renaissance criticism in general (194). I agree with Ganter when he claims “assessments of the Harlem Renaissance have been often shaped by parochial—and laudable—beliefs that members of different races, classes, and sexual orientations should celebrate their communities as a matter of pride” (194).

I argue, as my dissertation does as a whole, that this burden of uplift defines minoritarian representation and is a force against which a negative minoritarian aesthetic such as Thurman’s perennially struggles, to this day. Thurman’s aesthetic of negativity defied this focus on “celebration” and “pride,” which, as the keyword “pride” makes clear, shows the burden of minoritarian representation as not just a contemporary issue (Black is Beautiful, Gay Pride, and so forth), but one that troubled the cultural architects of the Renaissance. Thus, it is this “moralistic” valence in minoritarian representational norms of uplift that renders Thurman difficult to appreciate both in his own time and our own. Indeed, our own contemporary progressive politics finds discomfort in Thurman’s principled resistance to assimilationist political programs for literature and art.

I seek not to recuperate or redeem such a refusal to embody and champion the uplifting norms of minoritarian identity, such as the New Negro vis-à-vis Thurman. Rather, with this project, I want to lend credence and texture to this impersonal self-divesting aesthetic of minoritarian subjectivity and its anti-normative, anti-communal, anti-life-building energies.¹⁷

The Blacker the Berry: Aesthetic Politics of Reception

Thurman's novel chronicles the series of rejections and social solitude that result from the protagonist's originary ostracism from one's social and familial environment. Using the language of naturalism, *The Blacker the Berry* details Emma Lou's story as one based on the social determinations of exclusion and hardship. Emma Lou is thus doubly displaced from the outset: the first scene of the novel recounts her high school graduation, where she is the only Negro student in the school, and her feelings of solitude and ostracism within this white social world. Moreover, Emma Lou's family, which models itself as a branch of the old white Southern aristocracy, similarly ostracizes Emma Lou as its literal black sheep.

This double marginalization mirrors, yet transcends, Du Bois' definitive characterization of modern African-American subjectivity as defined by the metaphors of "the Veil" and double consciousness.¹⁸ *The Blacker the Berry* represents Thurman's handling of this theme of modern Black subjectivity. Thurman's novel then asks, however, What happens to the oft-told tale of color prejudice and racism when one is living solely or primarily inside the Veil (within one's own kind), instead of outside it? As he himself states

about his first novel, Thurman took the modern tack of looking at the inner workings of Black social life, rather than representing the more chronicled negotiations of Black subjects in relation to white society. As Thurman writes in “Notes on a Stepchild,” he “had made no mention of the difficulties Negroes experience in a white world. On the contrary he had concerned himself only with Negroes among their own kind, trying to interpret some of the internal phenomena of Negro life in America” (*Collected Writings* 239). I could say more about this passage, but I analyze a larger portion of it below. For now, I’ll simply comment on Thurman’s use of the third person to analyze himself as an author, as well as his overall pronoun usage in this passage: “he,” not “I”; the statement about Negroes “among *their* own kind,” not “our own kind”; and “in *a* white world,” not “*the* white world.” In all of these cases, Thurman detaches from personal interests and sociological community as well as from homogenizing “white folks” as a monolithic bloc. Thurman’s identification and disidentification from identity norms and categories renders his writing both situated and grounded, yet resistant toward claiming as his own any community that identifies as such. He was much too individualist as an artist to be subsumed under collective identity or interests: “He did not hate all white people, nor did he love all black ones. He found individuals in both races whom he admired.... He was not interested in races or countries or people’s skin color. He was interested only in individuals” (Ibid, 238). Thurman’s focus on individuals, however, does not preclude his interest in *minoritarian* individuals, and “Negroes” above all, as the subject of his aesthetic production. He did not flee from the community but rather sought to “view the whole problem [of race in America]

objectively, tracing things to their roots”—and, I would add, wallowing in the descent into the “problem” and its “roots,” without caring to find a solution in communitarian uplift.

A tale of internal and internalized racism and racial hierarchy, *The Blacker the Berry* describes the painful dynamics of modern urban “Negro Life.” Thus bracketing the omnipresence of white social hegemony in order to present a close-up view of internal cultural experience, Thurman’s novel represents Black society as structured by the same brutalizing forces of racialization and oppression as the dominant white world outside the margins of the novel. As the second part of the novel’s title makes clear, *The Blacker the Berry ... A Novel of Negro Life* represents what happens when a marginalized subject operates *within* her “own kind,” but is also tragically situated outside of its normative social contours, socially and quite literally beyond the pale. This novel chronicles the doubly minoritarian mode of “Negro Life” experienced among Negroes Old and New, doubly marginalized according to cultural dictates that mirror those of the larger world of white supremacy.

Of course, the title of the novel echoes the “old Negro saying,” which is given in epigraph: “The blacker the berry, / the sweeter the juice.” Yet, this title is ambivalent, in the sense of its rhetorical effect as a double gesture. *The Blacker the Berry ... A Novel of Negro Life* functions as a phrase comprising a title and subtitle. Yet, the use of an ellipsis, rather than a colon, constitutes one titular entity, thereby refusing by punctuation the distinction (and hierarchy) of title/subtitle that the phrase’s syntax suggests. The syntactical ambivalence inherent in Thurman’s title mirrors the symbolic ambivalence represented by the narrative as a whole. For, the title leaves out the gesture of redemption

in the saying itself. *The Blacker the Berry ... A Novel of Negro Life* echoes the syntax and the theme of the “old Negro saying” (“the blacker the berry / the sweeter the juice”), but the substitution of “the sweeter the juice” with “a novel of Negro life” signals the novel’s refusal to sugarcoat its tale. The subtitle also signals Thurman’s aspiration to realism, wanting to focus on the realities of early-twentieth-century “Negro life,” rather than the sweetening myth of proverb. The novel’s peculiar title, splitting the title into a curiously *dual* unity, also signals the realistic or socio-cultural location of the narrative (“Negro Life”). But also just as clearly, Thurman’s title refutes the cultural logic of redemption encapsulated in the proverb, that “the blacker berry” *always* contains “the sweeter the juice,” controverting this redemptive message by substituting a logic of social realism from the onset of the narrative, in the DNA of the title’s content and format. Indeed, the narrative will recount the “darker berry’s” experiences of *unsweetness*, or bitterness, as personified in the travails of Emma Lou. Thurman, in a typically acerbic aside in one of his book reviews, alludes to both the sentimental propensities of early-twentieth-century Afro-American fiction and his rejection of this cultural logic of redemption and uplift. Discussing the novel of passing, Thurman writes, in some ways echoing Oscar Wilde, that it is only in *novels* that African American characters light-skinned enough to pass for white ever return to the Black community, having seen the error of their ways and refusing the lures of whiteness and its concomitant privileges in society.

In his review of *Flight*, a novel about passing by Walter White, Thurman makes a statement that redounds as a comment on his own literary accomplishment in *The Blacker the Berry*. Thurman talks of many contemporary Black authors, but adds coyly, in a

parenthesis, that he would “leave to others [to render judgment on] the author of *The Blacker the Berry*”:

Had Mr. White been a novelist rather than a journalist, the heroine of [*Flight*] might have been one of the great characters in American fiction, for her creator, being in color her male counterpart, would have been able to make us privy to what the Negro who passes for white actually feels and experiences.

(“The Negro Literary Renaissance,” in *Collected Writings* 248–49)

Just such affective realism (“actually feels and experiences”) is Thurman’s seeming aesthetic impulse in *Berry*. As I discuss in the Introduction to the dissertation, what I am calling Thurman’s propensity for “affective realism” parallels our own era’s return to the experience and politics of identity, usually called Postpositive Realism.¹⁹ Thurman, too, investigated what this novel calls the “proceedings” of racism at a social and individual level, arguing for a less “rosy” picture of the Harlem Renaissance and cultural uplift movements like Locke’s New Negro. Such proceedings are individually marked by a focus on the affect of “lonesomeness” in the protagonist, as I discuss below.

Thurman then archly adds,

And while on the question of novels concerning Negroes who cross the [color] line, let us ask: when will some novelist emerge *courageous enough to give a truthful delineation*? To date, it has become a literary convention to have these fictional passers cross over into the white world, remain discontented, and in the final chapter hasten back from when they came.

There are several thousand Negroes who each year lose their racial identity, and of this number less than one per cent return to their native haunts. There is in real life none of that ubiquitous and magnetic primitive urge which in fiction draws them back to their own kind. This romantic reaction is purely an invention of the fictioneers. (*Collected Writings* 248; emphasis added)

No mere “fictioneer,” but rather a realist (and naturalist) in the modernist vein of the second generation of the Renaissance, Thurman espouses an aesthetic of affective realism

denoted here by his use of social statistics to prove his point about the unrealistic trope of the repentant passer in contemporary African-American novels of his time.²⁰

Standing as his literary manifesto, “This Negro Literary Renaissance” promotes Thurman’s anti-redemptive aesthetic, one tied to the reality principle. This is a minoritarian aesthetic of affective realism, which in this local example spurns the fictional sweetening of real stories of passing, a sweetening that he did not see in ordinary statistical life. Instead, Thurman holds to the principle of verisimilitude and realistic portrayal, the acknowledgement that real minoritarian subjects sometimes, indeed often, sold their birthright for a mess of potage if they could. Such an anti-sentimental, and anti-uplifting, message is typical of Thurman’s negative minoritarian aesthetic, one informed, as we will see, by his formal allegiance to literary realism and naturalism.

Indeed, as I will argue, this minoritarian aesthetic has largely influenced—and been influenced by—the largely negative reception history of Thurman’s inaugural novel. Moreover, the overarching theme and fate of the novel mirrors that of its hapless protagonist. Like Emma Lou Morgan, *The Blacker the Berry* is largely disowned by its closest kin and kith: academicians who study the Harlem Renaissance have largely focused on the luminaries of this movement, such as Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, and, more recently, Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen. Queer critics, on the other hand, when they turn to the Harlem Renaissance, tend to study these same figures, ironically, or the more recognizably—or *identifiably*—“gay” figure of Richard Bruce Nugent. Thurman’s work does not comfortably conform to a New Negro mode of literary representation. Neither does it conform to an unproblematically homosexual one.²¹

I would add that Thurman is also not recognizably *literary* enough, either. And this is despite Thurman's own highly exacting literary values, and his position of aesthetic leadership for the second generation of the Renaissance—as evinced not least by his editorship of *Fire!!* and *Harlem: A Forum of Negro Life*. Thus, despite his championing of an avant-garde literary aesthetic agenda, recognizable in his editorship of *Fire!!* and the journal's inclusion of stories of bisexuality, prostitution, and so on, which eschewed the aesthetic values of the New Negro and the Black bourgeoisie, Thurman is considered today—and more importantly, during his own time—as not living up to his own high literary standards. Nugent, for instance, complains about the first issue of *Harlem* in an eight-page handwritten letter to Dorothy Peterson. The letter begins, “Dear Dot: I suppose you have seen ‘HARLEM....’ I was the most disappointed individual.... Wally could have done *so* much better with the format.”²²

Indeed, reception of *The Blacker the Berry* in the Black press was mostly negative. Eunice Carter, in her oft-cited review in the National Urban League's *Opportunity*, assesses Thurman's novel in terms of bourgeois aesthetic values and finds it wanting.²³ First, Carter acknowledges the novel's popular success (“a book that has run into several editions”). Yet, Carter wonders whether Thurman's success

is a success of artistic achievement or a success consummated because Mr. Thurman has become a devotee of the most fashionable of American literary cults, that dedicated to the exploitation of the vices of the Negro of the lowest stratum of society and to the mental debauching of Negroes in general. (162)

Thus criticizing the subject matter of Thurman's novel as kin to Van Vechten's and McKay's similar treatments of the Harlem nightlife and underworld (“vices of the negro of the lowest stratum of society”), Carter concludes, “McKay has done it better” (162). She

then ends the review with words that I would argue Thurman himself might have written—and in fact did write—in his own dismissals of the Negro vogue: “[O]ne wishes for the chronicles of the Negro that same finished workmanship, that same polished perfection that characterizes the best in Anglo Saxon letters” (163). Ironically, Carter’s insistence on a supposedly objective frame of reference for literary value (“finished workmanship”) reveals her aesthetic Eurocentrism (“the best in Anglo Saxon letters”). Like Thurman himself, doubly ironically, she argues against publishing work by Black authors that is insufficiently refined to stand on its own merits, despite the “Negro vogue.”

Thurman was thus found wanting in executing the same supposedly objective, yet historically Eurocentric aesthetic values that he himself championed. For instance, in “Notes on a Stepchild,” an autobiographical essay Thurman wrote in *Aunt Hagar’s Children* (which remains unpublished, although the collection is included in *The Collected Writings*),²⁴ Thurman notes his “spiritual kinship” with a high-modernist Anglo-European aesthetic. Thurman name-drops modernist literary writers, including Joyce, Woolf, Mann, Stein, Cather, Stendhal, and Huysmans. Thus doing, he notes that “Taking as a motto Huysmans’ ‘I record what I see, what I feel, what I have experienced, writing it as I can, *et voila tout*,’ he began his first novel, spending his non-writing hours trying to find a master among the contemporary realists” (“Stepchild” 2–3, *Collected Writings* 236).

Correspondingly, in “Nephews of Uncle Remus,” Thurman launches this critique of his contemporaries’ literary production: “[S]peaking purely of the arts, the results of the renaissance have been sad rather than satisfactory, in that critical standards have been ignored, and the measure of achievement has been racial rather than literary” (296).²⁵

Carter's review thus hoists Thurman by his own petard, deprecating his writing as unliterary, mirroring his own critique of contemporary Black writers.

What is more, in another review, Du Bois himself echoes Carter's aesthetic criteria. Du Bois' critique of *Berry* struggles to reconcile opposing impulses—to laud Thurman's bravery in confronting an issue, intra-racial color prejudice, that he agrees is “one of the most moving and tragic of our day” (249).²⁶ Thurman's novel thus “frankly faces a problem” that exists and one that “most colored people especially have shrunk from, and almost hated to face” (250). Yet, like Carter's review, Du Bois' also seizes on literary evaluation and aesthetic judgment to qualify the novel's measure of achievement. Again, it is ironic how both reviewers fault Thurman according to the standards he himself championed (as in “Nephews of Uncle Remus,” cited above): here, the “measure of achievement has been” *not* “racial,” but “literary.”

But Du Bois' critique of Thurman goes beyond aesthetic evaluation—it also judges the novel precisely according to “racial” standards, values of uplift, and the burden of positive representation. Du Bois begins with a sympathetic account of the novel: “Here is the plight of a soul [Emma Lou's] who suffers not alone from the color line, as we usually conceive it, but from the additional evil prejudice, which the dominant ideals of a white world create within the Negro world itself” (249). Du Bois' review then turns to a biographically oriented critique of Thurman:

The author [who tells a story such as Emma Lou's] must believe in black folk, and in the beauty of black as a color of human skin. I may be wrong, but it does not seem to me that this is true of Wallace Thurman. He seems to me himself to deride blackness; he speaks of Emma's color as a “splotch” on the “pale purity” of her white fellow students and as mocking that purity “with her outlandish difference.”
(250)

Du Bois criticizes Thurman himself for the novel's discourse of systemic African-American colorism, or intraracial prejudice. In this passage, Du Bois cites an excerpt from the novel as proof that Thurman is not sufficiently race-proud. He then faults Thurman and locates the blame in him, not in the social world that the novel depicts and criticizes: "It seems to me that this *inner self-despising* of the very thing that he is defending, makes the author's defense less complete and less sincere, and keeps the story from developing as it should" (249–50; emphasis added). Such a reading renders the novel a symptom of one person's internalized racism, rather than viewing the novel more expansively as a treatment of the social milieu of the Black upper class and its *pigmentocracy*.²⁷ Du Bois thus lets the reader off the hook by casting aspersions on the writer; this review in a sense scapegoats Thurman, representing the problems and issues Emma Lou faces as the author's own. Not only that, but these problems of "self-despising," in Du Bois' parlance, are now the fault of the author as well. Such imperatives of uplift—or denying "self-despising," or eradicating it—are the essence of the logic and politics of identity. Thurman's novel is a satirical treatment of this logic, exposing the harsh irony attendant on a culture that demands uplift and bourgeois decorum from its well-heeled members, yet excludes those members that do not literally embody a racialized biopolitical vision of "Negro-white" respectability.

Indeed, Du Bois' commentary is ironic in that it lauds Nella Larsen's *Passing* (also published in 1929) in the same review as he challenges Thurman for not sufficiently being race-positive.²⁸ The irony inheres in both novels' 'mulatto' milieu, that of an upper-class Black bourgeoisie that *Blacker the Berry* names the "blue vein circle."²⁹ Larsen sets her story in this milieu, which is a social world that Thurman's novel itself is set in, and one that his

novel unremittingly criticizes as a pigmentocracy within a pigmentocracy. Larsen's novel thus satirically presents the "butter side up" face of the Black bourgeoisie, in the figure of Irene Redfield and Clare Kendry. Larsen's novel is itself a critique of this class, but one that does not question the destabilizing values of bourgeois comfort and color hierarchy within it as they affect darker-colored members of this class, as does Thurman's inaugural novel. Passing is represented as a social wrong, while Irene's "race-conscious Puritan" values are ironically critiqued, but not systematically rebuked, as they are in Thurman's novel. *The Blacker the Berry* renders these values as hollow and pervasive, and, more importantly, as unredeemable, through the suffering of Emma Lou at the hands of the über-respectable "Irene Redfields" that govern the middle-class Black milieus of the University of Southern California and even Harlem. Larsen's novel is an internal critique, Thurman's an internal evisceration, tracked through the effects of this social world on one of its members who is nominally included by grace of her birth and position and painfully excluded by dint of her darker skin.³⁰ Whereas Du Bois urges potential readers of Larsen to "buy this book," he laments Thurman's novel in the last analysis. Du Bois faults *The Blacker the Berry*'s ventriloquizing of color prejudice within the "blue vein circle" of Emma Lou's family, and the larger social worlds Emma Lou enters, as well as within the consciousness of Emma Lou herself, as insufficiently race-proud and too "self-despising."

Bu Bois' review is thus unable to see the ideological distance the narrator maintains from those prejudiced words and the worlds that it depicts.³¹ It is as if Du Bois misses the moments in *Berry* when the narrator becomes obtrusive and intervenes in the discourse of the novel, ironically situating Emma Lou's "self-despising," or the blue vein circle's

doctrine of “whiter and whiter every generation,” as anything but neutral ideals. Du Bois seems to miss the aesthetic distance between the novel’s (racist) discourse and its (anti-racist) ideological commitments. Put another way, the novel is largely narrated in the free-indirect style to render an impersonal yet subjective view of the social problems that haunt its protagonist, as both within and without Emma Lou’s consciousness. Part of what Du Bois finds lacking are moments that sufficiently verbalize against the blue vein doctrine. But Thurman’s literary aesthetic was heavily influenced by a late-nineteenth century and early twentieth-century turn toward interiority and subjective points of view, the abandonment of the reassuring pieties of an omniscient narrator that functions as the center of conscience as well as consciousness. As alluded to earlier, Thurman’s literary models extend from the naturalism of Zola and Dreiser and the decadent aestheticism of Huysmans to the experimental modernism of Joyce. Such literary models did away with the omniscient obtrusive narrator and, or as, the center of moral gravity that defined the mid-nineteenth-century realism in the Anglo-American novel. Unlike for Du Bois, for Thurman the novel was not a vehicle for propaganda or uplift, but a literary representation of social reality. As Thurman writes in “Nephews of Uncle Remus,” in an elaboration of his literary aesthetic,

every facet of life can be found among Negroes, who being human beings, have all the natural emotional and psychological reactions of other human beings. They live, die, hate, love, procreate. They dance and sing, play and fight. And if art is the universal expressed in terms of the particular, there is, if he has the talent, just as much chance for the Negro author to produce great literature by writing of his own people as if he were to write of Chinese or Laplanders. He will be labeled a *Negro* artist, with the emphasis on the Negro rather than on the artist, only as he fails to rise above the province of petty propaganda. (297)

By trying to “rise above” “petty propaganda” in *The Blacker the Berry*, Thurman became vulnerable to the charge of promoting the internal and internalized racism that the novel depicts. Here, “Internal racism” refers to the social milieu, the blue-vein circle, which ostracizes Emma Lou; “internalized racism” refers to Emma Lou’s own ironic and tragic incorporation of these very same racist values that exclude her. This double movement of the novel renders its richness as both social document of intra-racial color prejudice, which is the usual reading of the novel, but also as an aesthetic representation of subjectivity faced with this social abandonment and marginalization by its own kind. I am interested in the individual element that Thurman is known for, but reading his individualism not as a retreat from social concerns, but as a non-propagandistic or falsely optimistic treatment of the minoritarian agent marginalized within his own milieu. After all, Thurman said he wanted to represent “all the natural emotional and psychological reactions” of his characters in their “particular” milieus—here, from Boise to Los Angeles and finally to the “modern Black Mecca,” Harlem, and the New Negro Renaissance. The relative absence of an obtrusive, counter-posing force against the blue vein circle, or against Emma Lou’s sense of inferiority given her darker coloring, allows the novel to seem complicit in the racial propaganda it dissects, and criticizes by exposing. Thurman’s literary style—showing both “playing and fighting,” good and bad, beyond the “butter side up”—assumes a reader interested in the representation of “real” “psychology” as well as ersatz sociology (“Chinese or Laplanders”). In the real world the novel depicts, there was no universally acknowledged or empowered arbiter to intervene against the blue vein circle and the Black bourgeoisie’s entrenched color hierarchy; neither does such *deus ex machina* appear in

Thurman's novel. Indeed, the novel stands as a bracing critique of the entrenched social power of the so-called "blue veins" in the upper-echelons of Black society.

Other reviewers and critics have located the "self-despising" in Emma Lou herself, and in Thurman by proxy, through biographical readings of the novel that follow upon Du Bois'. In the typical autobiographical vein of criticism, Thurman wears a "female face," in Thadious Davis's influential formulation, which allows him to adopt the protective veil of his feminine protagonist to safely investigate not only intra-racial color prejudice, but also queer sexual desire, based on Thurman's personal experiences as a darker-colored Black man and as bisexual.³² Emma Lou Morgan, then, becomes Thurman's fictional face; her "self-despising" becomes Thurman's own. Thus protagonist, novel, and novelist become identified and circumscribed as hopelessly mired in racial self-hate, as insufficient representations of what Davis terms the "necessary Black subject" of African American fiction "from its beginnings," in the effort to combat the entrenched "objectification of Blacks under slavery" and Jim Crow and beyond (99). The critical biographical bent, therefore, not only collapses the careful aesthetic order and narratological distancing effected by the novel. Reading *The Blacker the Berry* as an uncomplicated extension of Thurman as an historical subject allows the novel to be dismissed, or open to such dismissal, as Du Bois enacts in his summary review, on *racial*, as opposed to *literary*, terms—ironically dismissing Thurman's novel on grounds both consonant with and contrary to Thurman's own principles for aesthetic judgment. Based not only on aesthetic but also on ideological grounds, it seems, *The Blacker the Berry* just can't win.

Affective Realism in *The Blacker the Berry*

Critics thus have reinforced Du Bois' alignment and identification of Thurman with his novel, and both with Emma Lou Morgan's central problem: the "tragedy of her life was that she was too black" (11), the narrator informs us early on. Uncanny in a sense, in that art seems to imitate life, the novel seems to anticipate the biographical readings it has inspired. As the Du Bois excerpt makes clear, Thurman's narratological choices, which involve a heavy reliance on focalization and free-indirect discourse, makes it difficult to ascertain where Emma Lou Morgan's own consciousness ends and her grandmother's (founder of the blue vein circle) or the impersonal narrator's point of view begins. Hence, when Du Bois uses the narrator's descriptions of Emma Lou's "outlandish difference" as evidence for *Thurman's* own espousal of such views, Du Bois elides the significance of narratological distance and the resulting ironies in the novel. As Gaither explains, tying *The Blacker the Berry* to Thurman's broader aesthetic, which Gaither argues employs the picaresque and the satirical to criticize Black social norms,

Emma Lou is an *ingenu*, a satirical character whose innocence of the world exposes the injustices and ignorance of society through ironic and often comic situations.... Her innocence, misled by the parochialism of her [blue-vein] grandmother, leads her through a series of misadventures through Harlem. Her picaresque search ... allows Thurman to criticize the black lower- and middle-class value system as it applies to color. (86; emphasis in original)

Emma Lou Morgan, Gaither assures us, is not to be confused with the narrative voice of the novel, nor with Thurman's authorial aesthetic agenda.

Departing from this premise, I would like here to enter the diegetic world of Thurman's novel more systematically. After a brief moment of plot summary, I will expand on my argument that *The Blacker the Berry* presents an intriguing narrative of ascetic self-

abandonment and impersonal subjectivity that challenges both supporters and critics of Thurman's novel. My argument goes beyond the notion of Emma Lou Morgan as an ingénue who is thus not to be taken seriously, except as an ironic figure, victimized by the racial caste system the novel criticizes. I would like my reading to productively depart from one critic's notion that Emma Lou Morgan is a narrative figure in a "perpetual state of victimhood" (47).³³

The Blacker the Berry ... A Novel of Negro Life tells the story of Emma Lou Morgan, whom the reader encounters in the first scene of the novel, on the day of her high school graduation. The narrative follows Emma Lou's peregrinations from her hometown of Boise, Idaho, first to Los Angeles to attend the University of Southern California, back to Boise, and then to Harlem. The setting is contemporaneous with the date of the novel's publication: there are mentions of the reception to Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* as well as to Locke's *New Negro*.³⁴ The novel is divided into five parts: Part I ("Emma Lou") narrates Morgan's experiences in Boise and her years at U.S.C., which she leaves before graduating. Part II ("Harlem") recounts Emma Lou's entry into the Harlem of the New Negro, where she expects to find a Black community more accepting of her darker skin than the blue vein circle in her hometown or the Black collegiate circle she failed to gain entry into in Los Angeles, again because of her skin color. The setting remains Harlem for the rest of the narrative. Part III is entitled "Alva," and shifts the narrator's focalization to a key secondary character who becomes Emma Lou's paramour. Part IV ("Rent Party") recounts a famous Harlemism, the rent-party, which Thurman stages in his other fiction and in his successful Broadway play ("Harlem: A Melodrama of Negro Life").³⁵ The last

section of the novel, “Pyrrhic Victory,” involves the coming to consciousness of Emma Lou and her final transcendence of the marginalized role she has adopted throughout the narrative.

It is this role that interests me, as well as the staging of Emma Lou’s troubled minoritarian consciousness in the world of the novel. The narrator frames the problems Emma Lou faces in this world in the idiom of literary naturalism and social determinism. The narrative frames “the tragedy of [Emma Lou’s] life” as principally resulting from the effects of pernicious environmental influences, rather than the result of genetic accident. Indeed, the narrative goes out of its way to impugn Emma Lou’s maternal grandmother and mother for *their* prejudicial attitudes toward Emma Lou simply given her darker skin. It is this familial matrix that implants the complex of inferiority that shadows Emma Lou until the end of the narrative; the novel can thus be read as a representation of the Countee Cullen verse, “My color shrouds me in,” which serves as the novel’s second epigraph.³⁶ Emma Lou’s collegiate experiences reinforce this originary exclusion within the maternal world in which she is raised; her experiences in Harlem merely redouble and intensify the same problematic or “tragedy.” In other words, everywhere Emma Lou goes, from provincial town (Boise) to big West Coast city (Los Angeles) to even bigger New York City and the modern “New Negro Mecca,” Harlem, she is accosted by the systematic exclusions of the color line within Black communities. Emma Lou’s geographic displacements represent a series of escapes from these exclusionary circles, only to find her in yet another similar situation, albeit in a circle of larger circumference.

However, there appears to be a profound contradiction in the Thurman corpus. As we have seen, Thurman's avowed aesthetic philosophy was vocally opposed to what he termed the "propagandist" persuasion of Du Bois. In "This Negro Literary Renaissance," whose use of the demonstrative pronoun suggests the quixotic contempt Thurman held for the very literary-cultural movement that he sought to redefine and spearhead, Thurman links his aesthetic agenda to that of other "experimental" artists of the Renaissance, "classing" his own literary work, as both editor and novelist, to that of Langston Hughes:

Fire!!, like Mr. Hughes' poetry, was experimental. It was not interested in sociological problems or propaganda. It was purely artistic in intent and conception. Hoping to introduce a truly Negroid note into American literature, its contributors had gone to the proletariat rather than the bourgeoisie for characters and material, had gone to people who still retained some individual race qualities and who were not totally white American in every respect save color of skin.

(*Collected Writings* 243)

Thurman thus draws a line separating what he considers superior literary production, his own and Hughes's, as further proof that he championed an aesthetic sensibility that strove to represent something non-propagandistic, "realistic" ("for [the American Negro] to be what he is") as opposed to "sentimental" for purely commercial reasons ("more profitable for him to be what he ain't") (244). Thurman defines his opposition to what he terms "sentimental" or "romantic propaganda tale[s]," going out of his way to single out such novels as Walter White's *Fire in the Flint* (1924). He dismisses the latter for being both commercially successful and, what for him amounts to the same thing, of satisfying the lowest common denominator in the American reading public. This is work that Thurman considers "followed the conventional theme in the conventional manner,"

a stirring romantic propaganda tale [that] recounted all the ills Negroes suffer in the inimical South, and made all Negroes seem magnanimous, mistreated martyrs, all

southern whites evil transgressors of human rights. It followed the conventional theme in the conventional manner. It was a direct descendant of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and had the same effect on the public. (*Collected Writings* 244)

The aesthetic opposition of “experimental” and “artistic” work to “sensational,” “sociological,” and “propagandistic” fiction echoes Thurman’s disdain for the “conventional manner” of representing these themes, chief among them the plight of living in the Jim Crow era in the South, as evidenced by his singling out White’s novel.³⁷

Thurman’s aesthetic sensibility would rather champion what he considers the school of “damned” Black poets and writers of the Renaissance,³⁸ such as Hughes and McKay, and their “experimental” “primitivism”—or rather their realism of the “proletariat,” which was “damned” by bourgeois critics who excoriated such accounts as pandering to white tastes for slumming. Thurman, in so doing, advances an aesthetic principle for Black fictional representation opposed to the illusions of “fictioneers,” one that instead would represent “the American Negro” “impersonally and unsentimentally” (248, 242). Doing so, however, would forfeit the profit motive, as Thurman perhaps knew so well, hinting at the negative reviews by the “polite colored circles” that awaited his own *Blacker the Berry*, which he laments was unfairly “castigated and reviled” (242).

Yet, it is at this juncture that a central contradiction arises between Thurman’s professed aesthetic values of “experimental realism” and an artistic production that includes the aforementioned short story “Cordelia the Crude” and the play he wrote based on it, “Harlem,” which was ironically subtitled “a melodrama of Negro life.” Thurman’s turn to the stereotyped “conventions” of melodrama in his Broadway play was for “box office reasons,” according to Hughes (*The Big Sea* 235). While deploring the conventional

sentimentality of White's novel, Thurman nonetheless penned tales just as "conventional" in "manner" as well as "theme." Chief among them, needless to say, is *The Blacker the Berry* itself.

Of course, Thurman is the first to expose this contradiction between the conception and the execution of his own work. In "Notes on a Stepchild," in reference to himself in the third person, Thurman admits that

he had been most surprised to realize that after all his novel had been scorched with propaganda. True, he had made no mention of the difficulties Negroes experience in a white world. On the contrary he had concerned himself only with Negroes among their own kind, trying to interpret some of the internal phenomena of Negro life in America. His book was interesting to read only because he had laid bare conditions scarcely hinted at before, conditions to which Negroes choose to remain blind and about which white people remain in ignorance. But in doing this he realized that he had fixed the blame for these conditions on race prejudice, which manifestation of universal perversity hung like a localized cloud over his whole work. (7; emphasis added)³⁹

Curiously, here, Thurman is "most surprised to realize" that *The Blacker the Berry*, "after all," had departed from his own aesthetic interest in the formally and thematically "experimental" and non-stereotypical, his opposition against the sentimental, the conventional, and the propagandistic. His surprise is curious inasmuch as the author seems to speak of another writer and not of himself. Thurman here writes of himself and his novel impersonally, from a distance, as if he were one of the unexceptional yet "respectable" writers he dismisses in "This Negro Literary Renaissance." He pronounces his first novel, in highly caustic terms, to be "scorched with propaganda." Thus, *The Blacker the Berry* falls short of his own aesthetic proclamation regarding *Fire!!* ("not interested in sociological problems or propaganda"). Here Thurman is thus criticizing the same aesthetic tendency toward a sociological and propagandistic bent he had maligned in Du Bois himself. And yet,

it is important to note that Thurman writes that the novel's "propaganda" is evident not mainly in its exposing "conditions scarcely hinted at before," which is to say its focus on the Negro as a "sociological problem." Rather, the propaganda stems from the novel's "fixing the blame for these conditions on race prejudice." This declaration surprisingly notes how Thurman had failed to live up to his own aesthetic valorization of the individual instead of the sociological, the experimental instead of the propagandistic. Thurman then writes that "he was determined not to fall into this trap again, determined to free his art from all traces of inter-racial propaganda," even as he promises to "continue writing about Negroes" ("Notes on a Stepchild" 7-8) as his primary inspiration.

The difficult Thurman faces, in practicing what he preached, is one of the reasons his novel was vulnerable to critiques that mirror his own reviews of the work of his contemporaries. On both aesthetic and ideological grounds, his literary output traffics in the conventions of literary naturalism and, more precisely, adopts the idioms of sociological and psychological discourses of the time. Such a compounding of the "New Negro" with the forces that impinge on his "real life," Thurman found, makes an implicit political argument that could be termed "propagandistic." Focusing only on his fiction, both "Cordelia the Crude" and *The Blacker the Berry* circulate the language of naturalism and social determinism, thus bringing a nonce-psychological and sociological perspective to bear to explain what the novel's discourse sensationally calls "the haunting chimera of intra-racial color prejudice" (72).

The challenge inherent in writing about individuals as social entities was thus, for Thurman, an inescapable byproduct of his interest in writing about the American Negro as

he was, and not as he must be. Thurman's *Blacker the Berry*, even more so than "Cordelia the Crude," belies his professed aesthetic values of detachment and "cosmopolitan" impersonality: "He had consciously detached himself from any local considerations, striven artfully for a cosmopolitan perspective" ("Notes on a Stepchild" 6). This seeming contradiction haunts Thurman's reputation, as we have briefly seen above, and goes toward explaining the conflict between his fiction and his authorial agenda. While professing an experimental agenda, informed by avant-garde modernist values of the realism of the streets and of experimental form, his fiction reads as conventional in manner, if not in theme. But the combined effect, to Thurman's readership, if not to the author himself, was a novel that seemed more a sociological document than a literary experiment, more an ideological critique or tool for propaganda than a literary monument detached and artful, but having little to do with real-world concerns: quite the contrary.

Ironically, in another review, Thurman writes: "All art is no doubt propaganda, but all propaganda is most certainly not art. And a novel must, to earn the name, be more than a mere social service report, more than a thinly disguised dissertation on racial relationships and racial maladjustment" (*Collected Writings* 183). That Thurman could have been writing this about *The Blacker the Berry* is evident from the reviews cited above. How to explain the contradiction that Thurman's differential positions as novelist and as critic represent?

And yet, at this point, it would be detrimental to reify a binary ideological distinction between "art" and "propaganda" that animated so much discussion of the Harlem Renaissance and that empowered so much of Thurman's own commentary on New Negro arts and letters. Perhaps Thurman the novelist abided not by an aesthetic

agenda—whether that of the detached cosmopolitan individualist, as noted in this passage, or that of the “race man”—but by the concerns of his theme and the organic development of his narrative. *The Blacker the Berry*, as Singh and Scott attest, combines elements of both the dirty realism of the Harlem underworld Thurman brought to the Broadway stage and the pages of *Fire!!* and the middle-class “White Negroes” of the blue vein circle of Boise and those of the pale Black sororities at U.S.C. Thurman’s novel, paradoxically, falls short of the purely aesthetic dream of transcending “the race problem” that Thurman felt was too programmatic and un-ambitious, frankly un-literary, on the one hand. On the other, *The Blacker the Berry* transcends the binary limitations of Thurman’s literary-aesthete view, which decries a notion of the novel as political document (“social service report”) as incapable of artistic or literary merit. The standards of racial transcendence, and thematic experimentation, as the measure of literary value meet in a novel that centers on the sociological and psychological forces that constrain the individual from attaining this “Olympian” transcendence of race and the freedom of an aesthetic economy free from the material constraints of form. As Thurman admits, “He was not interested in races or countries or people’s skin color. He was interested only in individuals, interested only in achieving his own salvation and becoming if possible a beacon of light on Mount Olympus” (“Notes on a Stepchild” 6). His first novel obviously abandoned this aesthetic dream of racial and social transcendence. As the protagonist of his first novel, Thurman’s first major “stepchild,” Emma Lou Morgan, so often linked to his own autobiography, represents the author’s double consciousness regarding the modernist aesthetic program he championed and yet consistently departed from in his own fictional and dramatic production.

Thurman could not tell the story of the desire to transcend race except in a story about the social, or *sociological*, impossibility of racial transcendence, and, indeed, about the ordinary desire to transcend racial determinism in an ordinary Black subject. Emma Lou, primarily seen as an ironic departure from the “tragic mulatta” sentimental tradition in American fiction, because of her tragedy and dark skin, is, according to the novel, tragically determined to not transcend her coloration because she is ordinary. Hence:

The people who, in Emma Lou’s phrase, really mattered, the business men, the doctors, the lawyers, the dentists, the more moneyed pullman [sic] porters, hotel waiters, bank janitors, and majordomos, in fact all of the Negro leaders and members of the Negro upper class, were either light skinned themselves or else had light skinned wives. A wife of dark complexion was considered a handicap unless she was particularly charming, wealthy, or beautiful. *An ordinary looking dark woman was no suitable mate for a Negro man of prominence.* (59; emphasis added)

And:

[T]here had been that searing psychological effect of that dreadful graduation night, and the lonely embittering three years at college, all of which had tended to make her color more and more a paramount issue and ill. *It was neither fashionable nor good for a girl to be as dark as she, and to be, at the same time, as untalented and undistinguished.* Dark girls could get along if they were exceptionally talented or handsome or wealthy, but she had nothing to recommend her, save a beautiful head of hair. Despite the fact that she had managed to lead her classes in school, she had to admit that *mentally she was merely mediocre and average. Now, had she been as intelligent as Mamie Olds Bates, head of a Negro school in Florida, and president of a huge national association of colored woman’s clubs, her darkness would not have mattered. Or had she been as wealthy as Lillian Saunders, who had inherited the millions her mother had made producing hair straightening commodities, things might have been different; but here she was, commonplace and poor, ugly and undistinguished.* (221–22; emphasis added)

The novel repeats and thus emphasizes the “ordinariness” of Emma Lou, both in the first passage, where she realizes that her darker coloring would prevent her from joining the Black sorority, and in the final chapter, where Emma Lou takes stock of her life as she has been abandoned by Alva for being too “color-conscious” (222). Yet, in both instances,

it is not *necessarily* the darkness of her skin, but the fact that Emma Lou is “ordinary,” that matters. Her “commonplace” and “undistinguished” position relative to the upper echelon of Black society—she is neither inventor nor entrepreneur, neither heiress nor bishop’s daughter—relegates Emma Lou to the margins of modern Black society, with whose “Negro-white” cultural values Emma Lou herself tragically identifies (“The people who, in Emma Lou’s phrase, really mattered”).

It is this focus on ordinary subjectivity and the failure to transcend the embodiment of “too-blackness” that renders the novel a compound of affective realism, using the discourses of sociology and psychology. The novel transcends the Eurocentric terms of literary value that constrain evaluations of the Renaissance’s aesthetic production—even Thurman’s own Eurocentric evaluations of the Renaissance. Pace the author, *The Blacker the Berry* short-circuits the debates over “Art” or “propaganda” that rendered the author’s own judgment that his work had “fallen into a trap.” Reading the novel as replete with naturalist idioms of social determinism and realisms of the street and the metropolis, however, allows us to see the sociological conceit that represents Emma Lou’s consciousness as a real historical phenomenon, a phenomenology, of her minoritarian subjectivity, narrated, impersonally, from the inside out.

Literary critic Daniel Scott, both in a journal article and in his collaborative introduction to the novel (with Singh) in the *Collected Writings*, reads *The Blacker the Berry* in ways that resonate with my argument (441–44).⁴⁰ Scott writes that Thurman juxtaposes aesthetic extremes espoused by Du Bois and Claude McKay, the bourgeois versus the primitivist New Negro aesthetic. So Thurman’s novel is a way to reconcile irreconcilable

aesthetic politics, one of uplift and one of primitivism (“Harlem Shadows” 331). Scott and Singh likewise maintain that the novel enables this juxtaposition by “painting all behaviors with the brush of performance. As the novel questions the fixity of race, it situates that blackness in an environment of constructed and performative identity that allows for a diversity of experiences” (*Collected Writings* 443). Yet, this reading does not take into account what I consider the sociological and psychological discourses of the narration, nor the idiom of social determinism, reminiscent of literary naturalism that grounds the “environment” of the novel. Scott and Singh do note the similarities of *Blacker the Berry* to Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, as an “exemplar of the young woman adrift in the city” (443). But they do not draw the connection to naturalism; rather, they view the “non-essential” explanations for race and sexuality in the novel as performative. Rather than link Thurman to a contemporary focus on the social construction of race, gender, and sexuality, however, I think the novel cries for the more synchronic connection to Thurman’s modernist aesthetic sensibility. This was an aesthetic that evolved out of naturalism in Europe and in the U.S., in figures such as Dreiser’s Maggie and Sister Carrie, as well as Emile Zola’s Nana—and Thurman’s Cordelia, a Maggie- and Nana-like “girl of the streets.”

More importantly, the performativity rubric that Scott and Singh provide may allow us to sidestep the incredible affective dimension of the novel. While it is true that *Blacker the Berry* focuses on the performative elements of racial consciousness—Emma Lou famously calls her dark skin a Black “mask,” as noted above—the emotional core of these performances is elided if the notion of performativity remains the endpoint of such an analysis. Rather than end with the dissolution of essentialist notions of race and sex in the

novel, I begin with the naturalistic discourse of environmental determinism, which places the affective representation of Emma Lou's consciousness, even her "self-consciousness," as central to the narrative. The idea that all the world's a stage, and that this allows Thurman's novel to see through to the social construction of racialization does not penetrate deeply enough into the phenomenology of racial performativity as encountered in *The Blacker the Berry*. Indeed, it is the potent representations of this phenomenon from the inside out, through an impersonal narrative voice in the indirect discourse of the novel, that the experience of racialization—and sexualization, and gender performance—comes through as a story of Emma Lou's "tragedy." Thus, the narrative's insistence on the affective or emotional centrality of the "tragedy" of Emma Lou's existence bears careful scrutiny. My reading also seeks to reformulate the focus on the narrative's performative construction of social reality as an aesthetic formation told in the terms of literary naturalism, in an idiom that explains or "fixes the blame" on this "tragedy" of ordinary Black experience ("the haunting chimera of intra-racial prejudice") on social determinism.

The recent critical work on affect in modernist studies, notably the work of Heather Love and Sianne Ngai, are crucial to my own understandings of the importance of attending to the negative affects of minoritarian subjectivity and Thurman's own negative affective sensibility.⁴¹ Often characterized as a contrarian, as Singh and Scott note in his *Collected Works*, Thurman evinces a self-negating and generalized negative affective sensibility that has been chronicled by most critics that hold his work dear to their hearts. In this regard, Hughes' oft-cited description of Thurman in his autobiography bears referencing:

Wallace Thurman laughed a long bitter laugh. He was a strange kind of fellow, who liked to drink gin, but *didn't* like to drink gin; who liked being a Negro, but felt it a great handicap; who adored bohemianism, but thought it wrong to be bohemian. He liked to waste a lot of time, but he always felt guilty wasting time. He loathed crowds, yet he hated to be alone. He almost always felt bad, yet he didn't write poetry. Once I told him if I could feel as bad as he did *all* the time, I would surely produce wonderful books. But he said you had to know how to *write*, as well as how to feel bad.⁴²

It is easy to see why critics have so often conflated the story of Emma Lou with Thurman's own. The biographical details that both Thurman and Emma Lou have in common are legion. These include: being raised in a predominantly white Midwest town (Salt Lake for Thurman, Boise for Emma Lou); attending college in Los Angeles (U.S.C.); coming to New York and joining a Renaissance already underway; and liberated sexual proclivities (including Emma Lou's sensual encounter with a male in a movie theater, and Thurman's own arrest for homosexual solicitation upon arriving in New York City). It is also just as easy to provide caveats to this line of inquiry. Novelistic characters are not human persons; it is a mistake to confuse them. Moreover, implying a biographical significance in the Emma Lou figure risks reducing the literary texture of the narrative to a superstructure, an allegorical layer meant to be unmasked and decoded according to the "base" or infrastructure of the events that compose Thurman's real historical existence. This type of hermeneutic operation risks flattening out the novelistic and the historical worlds by effecting their conflation. Such a procedure begs the question of priority and causality, to go beyond correspondence: So what if Thurman's real life inspired many of the details of Emma Lou's diegesis? Can we then dismiss the one in favor of the other? If so, which counts as the explanation, and which counts as the symptom, of the autobiographical "truth" that somehow "determines" the narrative?

I use scare quotes to imply that my reading does not follow this well-trodden path. Many critics, following Dorothy West's account, seem to dismiss the tragedy in *The Blacker the Berry* as merely the result of Thurman's own discomfort with being darker colored. And yet, my reading rests not on a one-to-one correspondence between authorial and novelistic figure, much less on using this indisputable set of correspondences to explain away the significance of the affective orientation of the novel and the centering of the narrative on the "tragedy" of Emma Lou. Rather, my reading of the correspondence between Thurman's own affective negativity and that negative disposition that shadows Emma Lou in Thurman's novel views both as producing a singular affective resonance in a complex socio-aesthetic order. As we have seen with the reception of the novel, the author and the novel are identified as interchangeable, usually for the purposes of maligning Thurman's or Emma Lou's affective stances, ideas, options, and choices. Carter's review infamously conflates Thurman and Emma Lou in decrying how Thurman "simply has created an incredibly stupid character. The moral that evidently is intended to adorn this tale is to the effect that young women who are black are doomed to a rather difficult existence" (162). It is perhaps what Carter calls the "stupidity" of Emma Lou that registers the difficulty of dealing with her story as a tragedy, her story as the "rather difficult existence" that the novel narrates despite, seemingly, the incredible "stupidity" that such a "moral"—propagandistic, as Thurman later himself acknowledged—would imply.

What good is this story if it seems that the narrative and the reader—not to mention the critic—seem to know so much more than the protagonist herself does, about how

Emma Lou should live her life? Why, indeed, does the novel insist on the “stupid” character of Emma Lou? And what exactly does this “stupidity” consist of?

The “lonesomeness” of a “total misfit”

One answer to this question is the affective world of the narrative as experienced via Emma Lou’s consciousness. It is easy to adopt the normative mindset to reality that Carter evinces when she decries Thurman for creating such a “stupid” character: Namely, Carter seems exasperated by Emma Lou’s lack of insight. Indeed, it is not until the last few pages of the novel that the protagonist has her epiphany. She then finally experiences the change in perspective that *is expected of the minoritarian subject as autonomous person*, despite the oppressive social conditions that make such autonomy harder to achieve. Carter’s exasperation is key as a revealingly affective reaction against the novel’s narratological strategy of presenting, and only seldom taking a step back from, Emma Lou’s lack of insight for the majority of the narrative. Such a narratological effect, namely given through the free-indirect discourse and the unusual flights from it into an omniscient narrative point of view, it is true, enact an ironic distancing that somehow renders Emma Lou the ingénue that Gaither argues elevates the novel as social satire.

But the novel’s interesting effect, for me, is the importance of Emma Lou’s incapacity to transcend her own social and emotional isolation. It is this incapacity to become appropriately (or normatively) socialized that defines the “stupidity” that Carter decries in the character, and produces the interesting effects and affective attachments to the novel. Emma Lou, quite simply, does not “get it.” She is herself “a snob” (45). What

she does not get, also quite simply, is that, despite her originary familial ostracism, Emma Lou must find another route to adaptive socialization. Such socialization is both a concomitant of, and the condition of possibility for, sovereign agency. This is the tragic catch-22 that the novel represents quite movingly. And so the odds of social transcendence, or uplift, are against her.

Thus, it is Emma Lou's status as a misfit in her own family, the literal black sheep, which what haunts her narrative trajectory, well beyond the confines of the family home in Boise. Emma Lou is ostracized and excluded in every social circle she penetrates, even, or especially, in the "black Mecca": "She had thought Harlem would be different, but things had seemed against her from the beginning, and she had continued to go down, down, down, until she had little respect for herself" (223). Other examples of the world of social exclusion depict how this experience originated in the cold bosom of her family: "Emma Lou had always been the alien member of the family and of the family's social circle. Her grandmother ... made her feel it. Her mother made her feel it. And her Cousin Buddie made her feel it, to say nothing of the way she was regarded by outsiders" (22–23). And again: "Her mother had hidden her away on occasions when she was to have company, and her grandmother had been cruel in always assailing Emma Lou's father, whose only crime seemed to be that he had had a blue black skin" (221).

As these two examples show, the novel is replete with instances where the attitudes of Emma Lou against those with "black skin" is made evident as a product of her own family's attitude against *her* "black skin" (and her father's, who was exiled from the family before she ever knew him). The phrasing "he had had a blue black skin" represents, in its

past-perfect construction, the social distance and finality of his exilic past-ness in relation to his daughter. The narrative arc is thus a reverse teleology, recounting a series of escapes from the racism of the blue-vein circle to the urbane collegiate atmosphere of U.S.C., only to have the reader and Emma Lou discover that every geographical area was pervasively “haunted” by color prejudice: “She had once fled to Los Angeles to escape Boise, then fled to Harlem to escape Los Angeles, but these mere geographical flights had not solved her problems” (255).⁴³

This reverse teleological movement serves to underscore the protagonist’s “tragedy” as inhering, too, in her ironic attachment to bourgeois Black social worlds and Negro-white class distinctions that categorically and simultaneously exclude her. The novel itself makes this self-abnegating or self-abandoning attachment clear. In one of its sociological moments, the narrative discourse takes a step back from Emma Lou’s limited subjectivity. The narrator becomes obtrusive, and appraises her in the idiom of naturalism, which combines the doctrine of social as well as “natural” determinism:

Emma Lou was essentially a snob. She had absorbed this *trait* from the very people who had sought to exclude her from their presence. All of her life she had heard talk of [the] “right sort of people,” and of “the people who really mattered,” and from these phrases she had formed a mental image of those to whom they applied.... Emma Lou was *determined* to become associated only with those people who really mattered, northerners like herself or superior southerners ... who were different from whites only in so far as skin color was concerned. (46; emphasis added)

The language of determinism here is ironic on multiple levels. Emma Lou was “determined” can be read two ways: that her will is to only connect with those whom she—aping her family’s wrongheaded color and class “snobbery”—deemed “superior”; but “determined” can also be read in the opposite sense, as *fated*. “Determined” here could

be read as implying a fateful force other than personal will—indeed, the very opposite of will—that is driving Emma Lou to “not to go out of her class” “or else remain to herself” (57). Emma Lou could be “determined” by her social upbringing to be a snob, thus making any question of her own agency or willingness in following her family’s “blue vein” dictates not a matter of choice but a matter of indoctrination and, more starkly, unconscious replication of the doctrine of color prejudice. Emma Lou, too, is hoist on her own petard.

The language of “determinism” recurs a few pages later, once more in relation to Emma Lou’s ventriloquizing of her own family’s “Negro-white” bourgeois ideology of exclusion and, for her, ironic self-abnegation: “Emma Lou was determined not to go out of her class, determined either to associate with the ‘right sort of people’ or else to remain to herself” (57). In another moment, the narrator steps back in order to illustrate the “poor psychology” of Emma Lou’s self-abnegating attachment to those who exclude her:

“Emma Lou was possessed of a perverse bitterness ... she idolized the thing one would naturally expect her to hate.... Emma Lou hated her own color and envied the more mellow complexions” (234). Here, in the language of “psychology” rather than that of sociology, the omniscient narrator again intrudes, again effecting a visible division in ideology, as if to reassure readers to distinguish this ideology from the narrator’s own. This technique of distancing by way of an idiom of social science “reporting”—let us not forget Thurman’s description of the (bad) novel as a “social service report”—recurs when the narrator explains Emma Lou’s “perverse” attachment to “the thing one would naturally expect her to hate,” namely, the Negro-white social hierarchy, as a blindspot in her psychological makeup:

Had any one asked Emma Lou what she meant by ‘the right sort of people’ she would have found herself at a loss for a comprehensive answer. She really didn’t know. She had a vague idea that those people on the campus who practically ignored her were the only people with whom she should associate. (58)

The novel’s cool exterior look into Emma Lou’s lack of insight represents a moment distancing from the protagonist, a resting point from the ‘wallowing’ in the personal emotional rhythms of desire and hopefulness and disappointment and pessimism that remain the novel’s hallmark as a study in character as well as the social determinations of that character.⁴⁴ Emma Lou’s lack of “comprehensive answer” signals her lack of insight into the dilemma that defines her experience of being left “to herself” and ostracized by the people who ignore her, the very ones she thinks “were the only people with whom she should associate.” It is this tragic irony that in fact seems to point to Emma Lou’s “stupidity,” in terms much softer than Carter’s; here, the narrator gently points to her “vagueness,” her not having “any idea” as to what external influences *unknowingly* shape her own character and her own unconsidered prejudices (“she really didn’t know”). More importantly, the narrative focuses on, more than on explanation, but on the phenomenology of self-abnegation that Emma Lou experiences throughout the novel. She futilely seeks the approbation of precisely that segment of the Black world whose social and class values she evinces, but which also humiliatingly excludes her.

This problematic of Emma Lou’s self-exclusion and self-abasement represents her chimerical quandary, or the “misfit” between her minoritarian subjectivity, which espouses an ideology antithetical to her own embodiment, and her experiences of socially determined abnegation, living with the “mask” of her “too-black” countenance. Along with the narrative series of exclusions and ostracisms, it is this experiential misfit, which is

responsible for Emma Lou's general affective state, a sort of baseline mood, which the novel calls "lonesome."

There are seven instances where the affect of "lonesomeness" is mentioned, most of which describe Emma Lou, or other characters that similarly do not socially "fit in." The first appearance of the descriptor to describe her affective state occurs during her first weeks in Harlem. The narrator writes that Emma Lou "was lonesome and disappointed" during her first days in New York (100). Unsuccessful in securing a "congenial" office secretary position—because "lots of Negro business men have a definite type of girl in mind and will not hire any other" (101), meaning that they seek light-skinned "girls" to fulfill this role—Emma Lou goes to lunch with Mrs. Blake, the employment agency coordinator, who then asks her about her college experiences. Emma Lou responds, "I was lonesome, I guess." "Weren't there other colored boys and girls?" To which she replies: "Oh yes, quite a number, but I guess I didn't mix well" (100–101). A second confirmation of the "lonesomeness" of Emma Lou comes after she first meets and dances with Alva at Small's Paradise, a dance hall that largely caters to a slumming white clientele. Emma Lou had gone out with her new employer, Arline Strange, a white actress playing a "mulatto Carmen in an alleged melodrama of Negro life in Harlem" (115), and Arline's brother. A few days later, Alva confides to his roommate, Braxton, that the only reason he had danced with "that coal scuttle blond" was that Alva had taken "pity on her, cause she looked so lonesome with those ofays" (128). On the next page, after this exchange, the narrator confirms Alva's perception of Emma Lou's lonesomeness, so pronounced that it was

evident to a casual observer who had just met her that very night: “Emma Lou was very lonesome” (129).

The final instance of the word as a descriptor of Emma Lou’s mood or, even, her state of being, is in the final section, where she is reduced to being the “mammy” for Alva’s disabled son, Alva Junior, who also stands as another naturalist element in the narrative. As the product of Alva’s dissolute alcoholism and sexual licentiousness, his offspring is “unfit” as Emma Lou is “misfit,” rendered an “idiot” by the same pseudoscientific language of sociology and social determinism because of his physical and developmental deformity (226). Not coincidentally, it is Emma Lou alone who begins to normalize and naturalize Alva Junior’s limbs: “Within six months she had managed to make little Alva Junior, take on some of the physical aspects of a normal child” (246). And yet Emma Lou “was lonesome again, cooped up in that solitary room with only Alva Junior for company” (247). Her self-abnegation includes, now, an ethic of care for the illegitimate offspring of Alva, whose dissolute ways have rendered him unable to work, and who, nonetheless, and perversely, “more and more relegated her to the position of a hired nurse girl. He was scarcely civil to her,” despite her affective and financial sustenance, indeed, her self-sacrifice and abandonment of her former friends and her self-interest (247). It is her affective disposition of self-abandonment that “perversely” ensures Alva’s and Alva Junior’s thriving.

Indeed, Emma Lou is described as a “total misfit”: Her former friend, Gwendolyn, and former mentor, Campbell Kitchen (a white patron of Black artists, modeled on Van Vechten), offer her this well-meaning piece of advice:

Campbell Kitchen had said that every one must find salvation within one's self, that no one in life need be *a total misfit*, and that there was some niche for every peg, whether that peg be round or square. If this were true then surely she could find hers even at this late date. But then hadn't she exhausted all possibilities? Hadn't she explored every province of life and everywhere met the same problem? It was easy for Campbell Kitchen and Gwendolyn to say what they would do had they been she, for they were looking at her problem in the abstract, *while to her it was an empirical reality*. What could they know of the *adjustment proceedings* necessary to make her life more full and more happy? What could they know of her heartaches?
(256; emphasis added)

What could they know of her heartaches, indeed? The narrative voice here, in the predominant free-indirect style, conflates the personal and impersonal, narrator and character. The narrator here voices Emma Lou's perspective, in the novel's usual way, which is to render her subjectivity via the limited third person. In addition, this rendering is sharply contrasted to the idealistic point of view of her well-meaning friends, who view her "problem" merely in the "abstract." The narrative discourse here seems to make an argument to her friends as well as to the novel's "friends"—the critics and readers who would judge Emma Lou's dilemma of "adjustment" as a mere abstraction. Rather, this passage seems to argue for the importance of experiencing the "proceedings" and the "heartaches" in order to appreciate fully the complexity and difficulty of the "problem" Emma Lou is facing. This passage marks an affective defense against the facile solution to the problem as a merely intellectual or "abstract" exercise.

The narrator seems to say that "it [is] easy" to presume that Emma Lou's "problem" has a solution to begin with. And given Hughes's take on Thurman, and Emma Lou's problematic attachment to the social worlds that exclude her—and her disdain for the social worlds that welcome her (namely, dark-skinned suitors, less-educated college students, and

Southerners)—it is “easy” to blame Emma Lou herself, her own prejudices, and self-abnegating attachment to these attitudes, as the root of the problem.

Which is precisely what Alva, her charming mixed-race suitor, who cruelly exploits Emma Lou’s affection, tells her. I want to quote the following passage at length, because I think it provides a microcosm of the novel and its depiction of both Emma Lou’s tragic-ironic “color-consciousness” and how other characters respond to it; how she remains on the outside, hopelessly on the margins of a vibrant, modern Black culture. Alva hypocritically blames Emma Lou for being “too color-conscious” (210). “Flared up,” she responds:

“Color-conscious . . . who wouldn’t be color-conscious when everywhere you go people are always talking about color. If it didn’t make any difference they wouldn’t talk about it, they wouldn’t always be poking fun, and laughing and making jokes. . . .”

Alva interrupted her tirade. “You’re being silly, Emma Lou. About three-quarters of the people at the Lafayette [theater] tonight were either dark brown or black, and here you are crying and fuming like a ninny over some reference made on the stage to a black person.” He was disgusted now. He got up from the bed. Emma Lou looked up.

“But Alva, you don’t know.”

“I do know,” he spoke sharply for the first time, “that you’re a damn fool. It’s always color, color, color. If I speak to any of my friends on the street you always make some reference to their color and keep plaguing me with—‘Don’t you know nothing else but light-skinned people?’ And you’re always beefing about being black. Seems like to me you’d be proud of it. You’re not the only black person in the world. There are gangs of them right here in Harlem, and I don’t see them going around a-moanin’ ’cause they ain’t half white.”

“I’m not moaning.”

“Oh, yes you are. And a person like you is far worse than a hinkty [sic] yellow nigger. It’s your kind helps make other people color-prejudiced.”

“That’s just what I’m saying: it’s because of my color. . . .”

“Oh, go to hell!” And Alva rushed out of the room, slamming the door behind him. (210–11)

Blaming the victim never seemed so irresistible. This exchange encapsulates the affective and relational energies of the novel and, I would argue, in Alva's own "tirade," echoes Carter's dismissal of Emma Lou as a "stupid character." Both Carter and Alva, in this sense, fault Emma Lou for not figuring it out. What is there to figure out? One might ask. The problem she faces, which, according to Alva—if not Carter—is not a problem at all, except that Emma Lou persists in seeing it as one. Hence: "Seems to me like you'd be proud of it. You're not the only black person in the world." If only, as Gwendolyn and Campbell also advise, Emma Lou could find the right "peg" and the right "hole"; if she could only socialize with her own kind! After all, as Alva exasperatedly reminds her, she's "not the only black person in the world." It is thus all too easy for Alva—and for the reader—to, in Thurman's words, "fix the blame" on her own "color prejudice," her own lack of "pride" ("Seems like to me you'd be proud of it"). Emma Lou's rejoinder, of course, is that it is far from easy to be "proud" of being "*too* black," when the theatrical reviews and literary salons Alva takes her to make fun of this fact all too often.

How then to resolve this social fact and inner contradiction, between Emma Lou's aspiration to be (like Alva) "Negro-white" when her own skin color is the impediment she cannot overcome? Put another way, Emma Lou's "lonesomeness" stems from her being unable to transcend her desire to transcend her "race"—here, "race" represents not blackness, but "too-blackness," in the parlance of the novel. Figures such as Alva and Gwendolyn successfully navigate the modern Black Mecca of the Harlem Renaissance given their "Negro-white" skin color and its attendant social and cultural privileges. The novel thus stages the benighted experiences of "how black self-hate, self-rage is created and

how black self-love, black empowerment can triumph,” in the lyrical phrasing of novelist Shirley Haizlip.⁴⁵

Yet, given Thurman’s affective realism and what I call the misfit-minority sensibility, the focus of *The Blacker the Berry* is on the first side of this acculturation process: the novel wallows in the “self-hate, self-rage” far more than it explores a context of “black empowerment” or “black self-love.” Indeed, in this exchange, it is evident how the narrative discourse seems to argue that it is far too “easy” to find the solution in the “abstract.” It is quite another thing to go through the journey, the wallowing in self-rage, lonesomeness, and self-pity that represents the pitfalls of a misfit minority disposition.

This exchange, therefore, illustrates the double valence of Alva’s exasperation with Emma Lou, and his ultimate collusion with the racial caste system he pretends does not matter. The theatrical show they attended, a few hours earlier, incites Emma Lou to “burn up with indignation” (205). It is easy to see why. Toward the end of the show, we are told,

Then followed the usual rigamarole [sic] carried once weekly at the Lafayette concerning the undesirability of black girls. Every one, that is, all the males, let it be known that high browns and “high yallars” were “forty” with them, but that. . . . They were interrupted by the re-entry of the little black girl riding a mule and singing mournfully as she was being thus transported across the stage:

A yellow gal rides in a limousine,
A brown-skin rides a Ford,
A black gal rides an old jackass
But she gets there, yes my Lord. (204)

It is clear from this cabaret scene, which directly precedes the exchange between Alva and Emma Lou quoted above, that Emma Lou’s understanding of how “too-black” women are perceived and received in Harlem is supported by the narrative.

It is her “snobbish” reaction to this marginalization and social ostracism that the novel calls into question: not the reality of her experience, but what she does with it. Instead of seeking some resolution to the dialectic of exclusion within what Thurman called the “Negro-white” world, by abandoning the “superior” values of bourgeois Negro-white ideology, Emma Lou struggles to reconcile these mutually exclusive regimes of sociality. This is impossible. Instead of abandoning the Negro-white value and social system, she abandons herself. But the novel is more interested in showing the impasse—the impossibility of Emma Lou’s reconciling a “blue vein” mentality with a “black mask” actuality—rather than staging an adaptive recovery of her subjective position in the world by reversing the values of color prejudice. Feeling pride in the blackness of her skin is out of reach for Emma Lou. Thurman seems more interested in staging the impasse of an immovable object meeting an irresistible force—the ineluctable social fact of a racial caste system and the obstinacy of Emma Lou’s own class and color snobbery.

In a sense, the novel’s entire narrative evolves from Thurman’s aesthetic decision, or desire, not to solve Emma Lou’s problem, but rather to trace its contours in excruciatingly painful and repetitive detail. The former passage, staging the break between Alva and Emma Lou, closes the penultimate section of the novel. The final part, “Pyrrhic Victory,” finds Emma Lou’s belated and “pyrrhic” resolution of her conflicted status as a darker-skinned woman of color that upholds Negro-white bourgeois values. If Hughes is right, and Thurman “almost always felt bad,” the novel lets us see that Emma Lou did as well. Indeed, the narrator notes her “doctrine of pessimism,” which was only momentarily “weakened by the optimism the future seemed to promise,” only to render that future, in

the flights from Boise to Los Angeles to Harlem, yield only a series of disappointments, further traps that frustrate her desires to experience the “happiness” and “fullness” of life (237). She too (*unlike* Thurman, pace Hughes) “didn’t write poetry.” Her subjectivity is rendered in the starkest terms as the social product of her ideologically stunted upbringing and a series of social milieus in which she is marginalized as deficient given the reigning *habitus* of a predominant Black bourgeoisie. And it is only in the final pages of the novel, after Emma Lou has reached the nadir of the reverse teleology of development, that she reaches the other side, and makes a decisive break with Alva and her experience of abjection.

The Blacker the Berry’s “Pyrrhic Victory”

So far, the argument I have made has foregrounded the richly negative affective dimension of Emma Lou’s narrative itinerary. One way to contain the excess of such a reading would be to territorialize it by explaining it—or rather by explaining it away. I briefly argued some critics have done just this, and referred to Gaither’s focus on the satirical dimension of the novel. Scott ‘recuperates’ the negative affective dimension of Emma Lou and her painfully solitary subjectivity by focusing on the novel’s representation of race, gender, and other features of social identity as inherently performative, or constructed. In this manner, these two sympathetic critics, among many others, find a way to sidestep what I consider the novel’s main achievement. And that is, to focus on the “proceedings” of Emma Lou’s “heartaches,” rather than staging the triumphant transcendence of such heartaches, rather than staging her social adaptation to a world—the

vibrant “proletarian” world that Thurman and other second-generation Renaissance writers championed, perhaps—that would better include her. Yet the novel does not, as I have argued, seek such victories; it is more interested in plumbing the depths, in wallowing in defeat. The only victory available in such a narrative economy is a pyrrhic victory, where losses are as important, if not more important, than any facile solution to the racial and social “problem” personified as Emma Lou Morgan.

Part of the problem, as I briefly noted, is what Carter derisively terms Emma Lou’s “stupidity.” For the remainder of this chapter, I will sketch out a few examples that demonstrate this naïveté in terms of Emma Lou’s lack of insight and, more importantly, lack of social intelligence. By this I mean the moments when, for instance, the narrator comments that Emma Lou “made little effort to make friends among” her new colleagues after becoming a public-school teacher (247–48). Why she makes “so little effort,” the narrator explains by again positing not stupidity, exactly, but insufficient social intelligence: “She didn’t know how. She was too shy to make an approach and too suspicious to thaw out immediately when some one approached her” (248). Emma Lou has been primed to ascribe a suspicious motive to any overtures of friendship, given her history of ostracism and being scapegoated for her “color-hypersensitivity” (232), being blamed as the “cause” of her problems, as we see in the following extended interior monologue, where Emma Lou “tr[ies] to fasten the blame for her extreme color-consciousness on herself as Alva had done”:

[B]ut *she was unable to make a good case of it. Surely*, it had not been her color-consciousness which had excluded her from the only Negro sorority in her college, nor had it been her color-consciousness that had caused her to spend such an isolated three years in Southern California. *The people she naturally felt at home with*

had, somehow or other, managed to keep her at a distance. It was no fun going to social affairs and being neglected throughout the entire evening. There was no need in forcing one's self into a certain milieu only to be frozen out. *Hence*, she had stayed to herself, had had very few friends, and had become more and more resentful of her blackness of skin. (222–23; emphasis added)

The impersonal language of the passage, in phrasings such as “making the case” and the conjunctive adverb *Hence*, imply an argumentative rhetoric of causation and explanation. Emma Lou, in the last section of the novel, overtly tries to *reason out* why she finds herself increasingly isolated and “more and more resentful” of herself and skin color, enduring “tortuous periods of self-pity and hatred” (234) despite her newly found financial independence as a teacher. Indeed, “now that she had found economic independence she found herself more enslaved and more miserable than ever” (251). The impersonal internal monologue recalls “the searing psychological effect of that dreadful graduation night, and the lonely embittering three years at college, all of which had tended to make her color more and more a paramount issue and ill” (221). The technical idiom of “psychological effect” indicates the narrator’s official discourse of social science merging with Emma Lou’s personal reminiscences, finding a rational explanation while describing the affective and personal effects of such experiences. The narrator has the insight of objectivity, a literal objectivity of the naturalist point of view regarding what the discourse itself terms the “*empirical reality*” represented in the narrative (256). References to “empirical reality” underscore the aesthetic of affective realism the novel sustains, and the orientation toward a “pessimistic” portrayal of this reality that Thurman holds to, rather than the uplifting ethos of Locke’s New Negro, built into the very concept of Renaissance.

But there are also limitations to this realistic “doctrine of pessimism” that the novel wants to portray: the protagonist’s own limitations. Emma Lou’s lack of insight continues to haunt her, as much as the originary cause of this lack of insight itself, her isolated and stunted upbringing within the blue-vein circle, as “the only Negro pupil” at her high school (11). Hence, even as she finds a “congenial” profession in teaching, ironically, she is incapable of successfully socializing with her Black colleagues. This is mainly a result of Emma Lou’s excessive use of makeup to hide the blackness of her skin, which renders her presentation outside the bounds of middle-class professional decorum. But this “failure to connect” is also a result of Emma Lou’s being unable to read the social cues that others, less marginalized and better socialized, would have been able to pick up on:

several times upon passing groups of them [her teaching colleagues], she imagined she was being pointed out. In most cases what she thought was true, but she was being discussed and pointed out, not because of her dark skin, but because of the obvious traces of an excess of rouge and powder which she insisted on using” (248).

And again:

It had been suggested, in a private council among the Negro members of the teaching staff, that some one speak to Emma Lou about this rather ludicrous habit of making up. But no one had the nerve. She appeared so distant and so ready to take offense at the slightest suggestion even of friendship that they were wary of her. (248)

After this, Emma Lou receives “an anonymous note, suggesting that she use fewer aids to the complexion” (248). The narrator, again obtruding beyond Emma Lou’s limited point of view, explains that

It never occurred to her that the note told the truth and that she looked twice as bad with paint and powder as she would without it. *She interpreted it as* being a means of making fun of her because she was darker than any one of the other colored girls. She grew more haughty, more acid, and more distant than ever. She never spoke to any one except as a matter of business. (249; my emphasis)

As a result of her *legitimate* “color-consciousness,” and the resultant lonesomeness of her affective disposition, Emma Lou puts on an antisocial mask. This is her off-putting “acidity” and “haughty demeanor,” Emma Lou plunges into a downward spiral of impersonal relations with her colleagues (“never spoke to any one except as a matter of business”) and antisocial anomie (“grew more haughty, more acid, and more distant than ever”). Her own lack of insight redoubles this phenomenon of ostracism, as the narrator remarks quite obtrusively that her faulty hermeneutic of suspicion (“She interpreted it as a means of making fun of her”) remains a stumbling block toward her gaining a foothold into a new social milieu that would at last make her feel welcome. In this sense, the naturalist orientation of the narrator’s interventions into the fabric of the novel is evident in the social determination of Emma Lou’s paranoid and antisocial individual “psychology.” And, because of this understandably paranoid structure—fool me once, shame on you, and so on—Emma Lou embraces a “businesslike” mindset that precludes the formations of new bonds of friendship. In this sense, her lifelong internalization of a Negro-white ideology that itself excludes and oppresses her, renders her own subjectivity impersonal, and her social relations merely functional.

By consequence, and even more perversely, Emma Lou is unable to rescue herself from this dilemma given her resorting to an antisocial impersonality as a way of protecting against perceived and real slights to her person. Her lack of insight dooms her to a solitary existence, her solitary existence dooms her to a lack of insight. And this entire psychological antisocial dynamic is grounded, according to the narrative, in the overarching structure of

“intra-racial segregation” (233) that haunts the novel’s Black urban spaces even in “the post world war days of modernity” (193).

Conclusion

In her chapter on *Quicksand*, Ngai suggests, drawing on Philip Fisher, that Larsen’s novel resists the two ways in which “literary texts solicit emotion from their readers: sympathy, in which ‘I feel what the other is feeling,’ ” and “volunteered passion,” where the reader feels what the literary character does not (or cannot) (188). Ngai argues that *Quicksand* “self-consciously departs” from the “sentimental ‘mulatta’ fiction” genre that it evokes and, by extension, frustrates the typical readerly response of *sympathy* for the pathos-ridden heroine of such fiction, personified in the unsympathetically “irritable” Helga Crane (189, 188). Further, Ngai states that Larsen’s novel also resists volunteered passion, or frustrates the capacity of the reader to feel the “missing fear, grief, shame or anger” that the narrative does not represent directly (Fisher 144, Ngai 188).⁴⁶ This reading of *The Blacker the Berry* productively explores, as I said at the outset, a representative critical claim, such as Jarraway’s, that Emma Lou Morgan exists in a “perpetual state of victimhood” and Scott’s helpful notion that Emma Lou ‘signifies’ on—revises, riffs on, transforms—the sentimental genre of the “tragic mulatta.”

Another important critical conversation that touches on the downshifting and lateral impasses that Thurman’s novel stages for the reader and within the diegesis—as the scene of reception regarding the “black” girl on the mule represents—is the work on minoritarian melancholia by Anne Cheng, David Eng, and Judith Butler, among other

critics. Yet, Cheng's account subsumes the negative affects and impersonal self-divesting mode of subjectivity that I focus on, naming this melancholia in the Freudian and post-Freudian conception of the concept. My reading resists thus territorializing the social and affective matrix of the minoritarian subject as construed in this aesthetic economy. To call Emma Lou Morgan racially melancholic would explain that which exists as an aesthetic resonance for both readers and diegetic characters, a phenomenology of pain that is not easily recuperated under the aegis of theoretical constructs. Indeed, Thurman's novel, as we have seen from his own and from critics' opinions about it, resists the gestures of defense and of recuperation that the novel itself implicitly solicits. Like Emma Lou Morgan, *The Blacker the Berry* might inspire our sympathy, but then reject it as a matter of stubborn ("stupid"?) pride ("She grew more haughty, more acid, and more distant than ever").

My argument extends this line of inquiry one step further, making the case for the importance of attending to *The Blacker the Berry*'s "wallowing" in Emma Lou's negative affects and incapacities for uplift and recuperation into the social. What Ngai terms the "blocked agency" of weak affects, such as irritation in Larsen's novel, is to a point a helpful intertext for my reading of Thurman's. Just as with Helga Crane, Emma Lou Morgan is a blocked agent, experiencing a range of affects—notably "lonesomeness"—that, rather than enabling a forward movement of social solidarity or reconstitution of the social, rather frustrates any such recuperation or rehabilitation. Instead, Emma Lou's series of commitments to an impersonal racist ideology that internally oppresses her, leads her to the nadir of a total self-sacrificial ethic of care, reduced to living out a stereotyped avatar of Black feminine abjection, as the "mammy" of a deformed child that does not belong to her.

And yet, Alva Junior is all the better for it. Emma Lou reaches this nadir of self-abnegation, the extremity of which leads to her final break with the dynamic of self-abstention and internalized oppression—though not with the battery of negative affects that registers and reinforces this state of being. Emma Lou finds the way out of her downward spiral in the final moments of the novel, as if Thurman could not finally allow her total self-abnegation to reign over the narrative. Although, as I have been arguing, it is precisely this sovereignty of the negative and the incapable, of the antisocial and the un-insightful, that makes this novel worth reading, yet extremely difficult to do so. While admitting my own sympathetic affective reactions to Emma Lou's sustained narrative of abjection, I have also tried to show how the novel has instead produced the very opposite in readers' reactions. The novel itself, like Emma Lou, has been "reviled," in Thurman's words. According to his friend and theatre critic, Theophilus Lewis, *The Blacker the Berry* is a novel of which Thurman "ought to be proud, but isn't."⁴⁷ While for me the novel evokes sympathy, for many readers, it evokes the opposite. As with Emma Lou herself, and perhaps with Thurman himself, the negativity of their affective sensibility promotes an equal negativity in their social interlocutors. The mimesis in this sense is negative, instead of duplicative, paranoid, instead of reparative, to use the binary of reading practices put forth by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.⁴⁸ The work that Thurman's tarrying with the negative performs, both as a novelist and as a critic, I think, is essential in representing the "heartaches" and "proceedings" of minoritarian subjects whose dilemmas of identification and disidentification remain at an impasse, unresolved, and, perhaps, irresolvable.

Thurman sought to represent the social and affective reality of things, while seeking to attain the Olympian heights of Eurocentric modernist literary prestige. My argument is that Thurman succeeded by failing. By constructing a novel whose sociological naturalism and psychological realism evokes the aesthetic program of modernism, Thurman defied the uplift aesthetic that his generation of the Renaissance sought to displace. By wallowing in the negative affective dimension of Emma Lou Morgan, and resisting both uplift and, what is the same thing, a minoritarian resolution to her problems, Thurman also impugned a social structure by revealing the intransigent social determinants that render Emma Lou's supposedly "stupid character," as the product of a sustained racialized and gendered oppression. Thurman tracks the vicissitudes of such oppression not only by staging Emma Lou's impersonal negation of her own personhood, reducing herself to a "mask" of "despised blackness," and the resulting stunting of self-actualization. Thurman shows the suffering of those who remain as the ethical residuum, in Michael Warner's terms, once an oppressed minority begins the forward march toward assimilation and "progress."⁴⁹

There are political implications of such a representational strategy, beyond the pathos of radical alterity, and the exemplary ethics of such a strategy, that Thurman's novel documents. What might those political implications be? One would be the turn away from the triumphalist model of personhood that subtends the political dimension altogether. Even while *The Blacker the Berry* wallows in the affective world of negativity and impasse, some of these emotional correlatives, such as Emma Lou's "self-hate," seem unlikely to yield effective political momentum. Indeed, the novel stages how these affective states in fact disable the possibility of recuperation and rehabilitation; they are disabling of what

Berlant calls sovereign agency. Instead, Emma Lou represents lateral agency, which, as noted, does not look like agency at all. She does escape the self-collusive fate of being reduced to Alva Junior's "mammy," and finally walks out of the proverbial door into a new vision of herself and of life itself:

She was tired of running up blind alleys all of which seemed to converge and lead her ultimately to the same blank wall. Her motto from now on would be "find—not seek." All things were at one's finger-tips. Life was most kind to those who were judicious in their selections, and *she, weakling that she now realized she was*, had not been a connoisseur. (258; emphasis added)

The narrator then goes on to talk of Emma Lou's determination to "fight future battles" against the self-abnegation that has haunted her since the beginning. But it is this instance that I would like to end with. Here, the narrator again intrudes with the language of naturalist determinism (Emma Lou as a social "*weakling*"), implying the epiphany of self-transcendence necessitated by the "victory" part of the final section of the novel. The narrative of uplift requires that all minoritarian subjects transcend somehow, or die trying in a heroic death, even if she, for the majority of the narrative, has no prior conceptual wherewithal with which to effect such transcendence ("that she now realized she was"; "had not been a connoisseur"). The late epiphany rescues Emma Lou from her fated abject self-oppression as well as from, presumably, a future comprised of more of the same: the "blank wall" of social oppression.

But it is Thurman's desire to wallow in the "pyrrhic," even as he injects a backward sense of victory—"backward" in the Love sense of the term—that is instructive as a model for how normative political agency asks too much of minoritarian subjects. This novel traces the burdens of "self-respect" entailed in normative personhood, as well as the

unlikely path from “self-hate” to “self-empowerment” that burdens the itinerary of minoritarian subjective elaboration. Both the burden of personhood and the burden of minoritarian representation are suspended, in the subjective shrinking away from the social and the political in an impersonal impasse that often avoids social attachment altogether, for fear of further ostracism or humiliation. The “total misfit” minority the novel depicts is reduced to the bare minimum of agency and, ironically, represents an existence of self-alterity and self-evacuation that makes living, for oneself, much less for others, nearly impossible.⁵⁰ To cross over from this liminal impasse, from the sense of being stuck, in Berlant’s terms, to the promised land of social integration and political agency is not a linear movement, but a “tortuous” “proceeding” shrouded by the veil of lonesomeness, bitterness, self-hate, and self-pity.

It is a pyrrhic victory indeed that Thurman shows us the veil and the shrouding of racialized objectification and tragic subjectivation (“My color shrouds me in”; “the tragedy of her life”), showing the immense odds and affective quicksand that minoritarian subjects struggle against, as a suspended form of agency, or a form of drowning that is a form of survival. Even if not in Thurman’s time, but instead in ours, we might better appreciate the relative interest and significance and—yes—sympathy that such haunting tales produce. The burden of representation may not be quite as heavy for minoritarian subjects, as it was for Thurman’s protagonist, or for Thurman himself. But that is due to the aesthetic agency and affective realism of novels such as this one.⁵¹ Thurman himself, in an unpublished review of his second novel, *Infants of the Spring*, writes about the agency of the aesthetic as it “impelled [him] to write”: “The characters and their problems cried out for

release. They intruded themselves into his every alien thought. And assumed an importance which blinded him to their true value. The faults and virtues of the novel, then, are the direct result of this inescapable compulsion” (*Collected Writings* 226). I would conclude that with hindsight, we can appreciate the faults better than the virtues of Thurman’s narrative, insofar as it illuminates a minoritarian aesthetic of negative self-management and wallowing in the bad affects that attend misfit minorities, in double exile from the “rosy castles” of majority culture and collective uplift.

NOTES

¹ Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry ... A Novel of Negro Life* (1929; New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969), 223. Further page references are to this edition, and will be embedded parenthetically in the text.

² Amritjit Singh, "Introduction: Wallace Thurman and the Harlem Renaissance," in *The Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman: A Harlem Renaissance Reader*, ed. Amritjit Singh and Daniel M. Scott, III (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 1–28, 18. Further references to Singh's introduction embedded parenthetically in the text.

³ Amritjit Singh and Daniel M. Scott, III, eds. *The Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman: A Harlem Renaissance Reader* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 232. Further citations to the co-authored volume embedded parenthetically in the text. Singh and Scott add that *Aunt Hagar's Children* "presents the problematic position of a Black man who adopts the radical skepticism of a[n] [H.L.] Mencken and directs that skepticism toward developing a critique of his own community" (230–31). Singh and Scott, drawing on the work of Eleonore van Notten, argue that Thurman's "radical skepticism" is modeled after H. L. Mencken, whom Thurman read widely and corresponded with, albeit without gaining publication in Mencken's *American Mercury* (229–30). Eleonore van Notten, *Wallace Thurman's Harlem Renaissance* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994). More on Thurman's negative affective sensibility below.

⁴ Fisher, *The Walls of Jericho* (1928; Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer Company, 1992). Fisher was also the author of the famed short story about Harlem, "The City of Refuge" (*Atlantic Monthly* Feb. 1925).

⁵ Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven* (1926; New York: Octagon/Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980). McKay, *Home to Harlem* (1928; New York: Northeastern University Press, 1987).

⁶ Wallace Thurman, "Cordelia the Crude," which is the first literary piece in the first and only issue of *Fire!!: A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists*, ed. Wallace Thurman (New York: The Fire!! Press, 1926): 5–6. Because the only surviving issues are collector's editions—most were unsold and placed in indefinite storage in a basement where, ironically, they perished in a fire—the magazine was reprinted in 1990, with an introduction by Richard Bruce Nugent and a retrospective commentary by Thomas H. Wirth.

⁷ Indeed, Dorothy West's oft-cited memoir of Thurman and the Harlem Renaissance, "Elephant's Dance," claims that "there is no other name that typifies that period as does that of Wallace Thurman" and that Thurman was "perhaps the most symbolic figure of the Literary Renaissance in Harlem" (77, 85). Dorothy West, "Elephant's Dance: A Memoir of Wallace Thurman," *Black World* 20.1 (Nov. 1970): 77–85. (Further references embedded parenthetically in the text.) West registers his cultural importance to the Renaissance, despite Thurman's arrival in Harlem after the movement had attained public visibility, not least through Locke's publication of the *New Negro*, first as a special issue of *Survey Graphic*, and then as a stand-alone anthology. Alain Locke, ed. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (1925; New York: Touchstone Books, 1992).

⁸ Wallace Thurman, “Negro Artists and the Negro,” *New Republic* 52 (Aug. 31, 1927): 37–39.

⁹ “When the Negro Was In Vogue” is the title of a subsection of Hughes’ autobiography, *The Big Sea* (New York: Knopf, 1945), 223–32, on the Harlem Renaissance. David Levering Lewis’s *When Harlem Was In Vogue* (New York: Knopf, 1981) also echoes this resonant phrase.

¹⁰ Langston Hughes, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (New York: Knopf, 1927).

¹¹ For instance, Granville Ganter, in a recent article, refers to Thurman’s “most challenging characteristic,” what Ganter terms Thurman’s “acerbic intractability” and bohemian sensibility (194). Ganter, “Decadence, Sexuality, and the Bohemian Vision of Wallace Thurman,” in *New Voices of the Harlem Renaissance: Essays on Race, Gender, and Literary Discourse*, ed. Australia Tarver and Paula C. Barnes (Madison, WI: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), 194–213. Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text.

¹² I take Daniel Walker’s assessment as representative of Harlem Renaissance criticism as a whole, when he notes that Thurman “believed that artistic concerns outweighed those of the political, social, or personal nature. This posture put him at odds with Harlem’s old guard, most notably Du Bois and Locke [and] Charles Johnson” (154). Walker, “Exploding the Canon: A Re-Examination of Wallace Thurman’s Assault on the Harlem Renaissance” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 22.3 (1998): 153–58. Further references embedded parenthetically in the text.

¹³ Perhaps the most considered and influential treatment of the concept of disidentification with regard to minoritarian racial, ethnic, gendered, and sexual identity is José Esteban Muñoz’s *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), where he defines the term as a “modality of performance” (ix). Muñoz looks at performance artists, specifically those whose theatrical *modus operandi* are to visibly capture and rupture the essence of intersectional identity—be it racial codes of Black masculinity, for instance—and in so doing remake the space of performance into a “queer world” or queer counter-public (ix). By defining disidentification as a performative form of political action, Muñoz seeks to de-essentialize the notion of (minoritarian) identity. Dis-identity is performative (following Butler’s *Gender Trouble*) and thus a mode of socially constructed embodiment that Muñoz’s performance artists—such as Vaginal Crème Davis—fashion in order to de-naturalize identity norms such as Black masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁴ Wallace Thurman, *Infants of the Spring* (1932; Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992).

¹⁵ Daniel Walker refers to Dorothy West’s memoir, “The Elephant’s Dance,” cited above. Granville Ganter, in a recent article, also makes note of Thurman’s “most challenging characteristic,” what Ganter calls Thurman’s “acerbic intractability” and subsumes under the notion of Thurman’s “bohemian” sensibility (194). However, I think that the term “bohemian” does not do justice to the negative affective complex that I foreground as definitive of Thurman’s minoritarian aesthetic; nor is it specific to Thurman’s situatedness as a second-generation Harlem Renaissance author.

¹⁶ My thanks to David Kurnick for this insight.

¹⁷ I situate my project partially within a domain of queer modernist studies and contemporary performance studies and queer of color critique. I envision this project in conversation with the conceptual work on disidentification and minoritarian performativity by José Muñoz, as sketched above; the queer theorizations of impersonality by Tim Dean and Leo Bersani; the work on non-sovereign modes of agency theorized by Lauren Berlant; and recent work on negative affect by Sianne Ngai and Heather Love. See Introduction and Chapter Three, on Christopher Isherwood.

¹⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; New York: Bantam/Random House, 1989).

¹⁹ The genesis of postpositive realism is normally attributed to Satya Mohanty and the think tank called the Future of Minority Studies (www.fmsproject.cornell.edu), which has held institutes and has published several volumes arguing for a return to intersectional analysis and the politics of experience and collective identity. This return occurs in the aftermath of the poststructuralist era, or the late 1990s/early aughts. See, for instance, *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Michael Hames-García and Paula M. L. Moya (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), and *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, eds. Linda Martín Alcoff, Michael Hames-García, Satya P. Mohanty, and Paula M. L. Moya (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

²⁰ Thurman neglects significant counter-examples, however, including James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912; reissued in 1927) and Larsen's own *Passing* (1929), the latter of which he cites, but which does not end with a happy return to Clare Kendry's "own kind." James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*. Introduction by Carl Van Vechten (New York: Knopf, 1927). More on Larsen below.

²¹ As Ganter explains, "Thurman was neither a picture of heterosexual virility nor was he exclusively gay. Combined with his lukewarm interest in promoting his Black identity, Thurman has not found a comfortable place amid the progressive identity politics of post-1960s literary scholarship. In contrast to fey Richard Bruce Nugent, who has been welcome by contemporary gay scholars, Thurman remains a wall-flower, neither self-consciously Black enough, nor gay enough to serve as a Renaissance poster boy" (194–95).

²² Nugent then proceeds to itemize the table of contents in terms of the shortcomings of each piece in the journal. Richard Bruce Nugent, letter to Dorothy Peterson, Wallace Thurman Archive, Yale University, Beinecke Library, n.d. *Harlem: A Forum of Negro Life*, like *Fire!!* before it, only produced an inaugural issue, which appeared in November 1928.

²³ Eunice Carter, Review of *The Blacker the Berry. Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* Volume 7 (May 1929) [Rpt. New York: Kraus, 1969]: 162–63]. Further citations embedded in text.

²⁴ My citations from "Notes on a Stepchild" refer to the typescript, in The Wallace Thurman Papers, Yale University Beinecke Library, Box 1, Folder 11, n.d. (Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text.) The editors of *the Collected Writings*, Singh and Scott, attest that Thurman composed the manuscript of *Aunt Hagar's Children* (including previously published essays) "from April to September 1929" in Salt Lake City (229).

²⁵ Wallace Thurman, "Nephews of Uncle Remus" *The Independent* 119 (Sept. 1927): 297–98.

²⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Browsing Reader." Review of *The Blacker the Berry*. *Crisis* 36.7 (July 1929): 234, 249–50. Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text.

²⁷ Term "pigmentocracy" taken from Daniel Walker (155, 156).

²⁸ Nella Larsen, "*Quicksand*" and "*Passing*." Ed. Deborah E. McDowell (1928, 1929; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986).

²⁹ Emma Lou Morgan's maternal grandmother founded the "blue vein circle" in Boise, Idaho, a self-anointed "superior class," as a grouping of light-colored Black folks, so called because "all of its members were fair-skinned enough for their blood to be seen pulsing purple through the veins of their wrists" (*Blacker the Berry* 18). The blue vein circle's "motto" or doctrine is "'Whiter and whiter every generation,' until the grandchildren of the blue veins could easily go over into the white race and become assimilated so that problems of race would plague them no more" (19). It is this milieu that *Passing* also documents, albeit from the safely entrenched position of an Irene Redfield, herself someone who passes comfortably across the color line.

³⁰ Thurman's review of *Quicksand* makes a similar critique of its bourgeois milieus and, not surprisingly, of Du Bois for his espousal of genteel middle-class Black society (read: lighter-skinned): "The author of *Quicksand* no doubt pleases Dr. Du Bois for she stays in her own sphere and writes about the sort of people one can invite to one's home without losing one's social prestige" (*Collected Writings* 220). Thurman, characteristically caustic, adds: "She doesn't give white people the impression that all Negroes are gin drinkers, cabaret hounds and of the half world. Her Negroes are all of the upper class. And how!" (Ibid). It is evident that the virtues of Larsen's novel are minimized if seen through Thurman's lens; this is also crucial to note as a problem of focus, and not a final judgment on *Quicksand* or Du Bois, for that matter. In the Renaissance, such negative affective misalliances and détentes were, as I hope to show, legion.

³¹ For more on the aesthetic distancing of *The Blacker the Berry*, see Renoir W. Gaither, "The Moment of Revision: A Reappraisal of Wallace Thurman's Aesthetics in *The Blacker the Berry* and *Infants of the Spring*" *College Language Association Journal* 37.1 (1993): 81–93. Further citations to Gaither embedded parenthetically in the text.

³² Thadious M. Davis, "A Female Face: Or, Masking the Masculine in African American Fiction before Richard Wright." In *Teaching African American Literature: Theory and Practice*. Ed. Maryemma Graham, Sharon Pineault-Burke, and Marianna White Davis (New York: Routledge, 1998), 98–131. Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text. For more on Thurman's bisexuality as irreducible to either homo- or heterosexual identity, see Ganter, op. cit., esp. 194–97.

³³ David Jarraway, "Tales of the City: Marginality, Community, and the Problem of (Gay) Identity in Wallace Thurman's 'Harlem' Fiction," *College English* 65.1 (2002): 36–52.

³⁴ The narrator comments, "Emma Lou wondered what the population of Negro Harlem was. She should have read that Harlem number of the Survey Graphic issued two or three years ago" (142). Locke's *New Negro* anthology first appeared as a special issue of the

magazine *Survey Graphic* in March 1925, entitled “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro”; reference to *Nigger Heaven* appears on 219.

³⁵ Wallace Thurman and William Jourdan Rapp, *Harlem: A Melodrama of Negro Life* (1928). In *Collected Writings* (306–69). After many revisions and rewritings, the play originally premiered on Broadway at the Apollo Theatre (not to be confused with Apollo in the Harlem) on February 20, 1929. The original inspiration for the play was Thurman’s short story “Cordelia the Crude.”

³⁶ As noted above, the first epigraph, “The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice.”

³⁷ Walter White, *Fire in the Flint* (1924; Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996). Set in Georgia, the novel’s 1996 cover blurb sensationally reads “A young doctor’s tragic confrontation with the segregated South.”

³⁸ Thurman constructs a binary between the “respectable” (among whom he counts White, Larsen, and Jessie Fausset) and the “damned” among “contemporary Negro novelists” (“This Negro Literary Renaissance,” 247). Thurman ironically claims that “only among the damned is there any show of promise, any kernel of talent” (Ibid). Additionally, the “damned” espouse realistic principles of aesthetic representation, the latter of which implicitly includes “the author of *The Blacker the Berry*,” as he notes about himself (“This Negro Literary Renaissance,” 247–49).

³⁹ “Notes on a Stepchild.” TS. Box 1, Folder 11, Beinecke Library; *Collected Writings* 239. Some variation in the typescript and published document necessitate comparing the two versions, though the revisions are minor in this passage.

⁴⁰ Daniel M. Scott III, “Harlem Shadows: Re-evaluating Wallace Thurman’s *The Blacker the Berry*” *MELUS* 29.3–4 (Fall–Winter 2004): 323–39. Further citations embedded in the text.

⁴¹ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁴² Langston Hughes, *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: Autobiography: The Big Sea*. Vol. 13. Ed. Joseph McClaren (1940; Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 185; emphasis in original.

⁴³ This moment occurs when Emma Lou is contemplating returning home after one of the last of her disappointments chronicled in the novel: the man she had considered marrying had instead married her friend Gwendolyn. After this setback, Emma Lou returns to Alva, and becomes his caretaker and “mammy” to his son, Alva Junior, who is developmentally and physically disabled.

⁴⁴ Larsen’s *Quicksand* is perhaps a better intertext than *Passing* for Thurman’s first novel. Like *The Blacker the Berry*, *Quicksand* also symbolically depends on a spatial metaphor of descent. My reading, which I short-hand using the notion of *wallowing*, is suggested in my epigraph, which summarizes Emma Lou’s trajectory as ineluctably going “down, down, down, until she had little respect for herself” (223). For a fascinating reading of *Quicksand*, see Ngai.

⁴⁵ Shirlee Taylor Haizlip, Introduction. Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 9–15, 14.

⁴⁶ Philip Fisher, *The Vehement Passions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Theophilus Lewis, “Wallace Thurman is Model Harlemit” *Amsterdam News* (c. 1930).

⁴⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–52.

⁴⁹ Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999).

⁵⁰ In "Notes on a Stepchild," Thurman notes that he "sympathized with the condition of the peasant Negro in the South and with the dilemma of all Negroes who found themselves caged in and inhibited by color prejudice," while adding, significantly for my study of minoritarian subjectivity in a minor key, that he also "sympathized with every other minority group in the world, some of whom he knew were more to be pitied than the American Negro" (*Collected Writings* 238). I want to emphasize the solidarity across lines of difference that Thurman expresses here, which is significant not for its symptomatic desire for transcendence of race and the problem of the color line, but for Thurman's interest in matters that align minoritarian subjects given the "amount of discomfort, [and] interference ... inevitably to be expected from one's fellow men, no matter what happened to be one's color or race or environment" (*Ibid.*). Thurman's pan-minoritarian (he terms it a "consciously detached," "cosmopolitan perspective") in many ways is an artistic position consonant with the network of Black cultural internationalism that Brent Edwards studies in *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). Of course, Thurman's allergy to programmatic Afrocentrism (à la the New Negro, for instance)—his identification with what I could term a *pan-minoritarianism* that seeks to transcend "pigeon-holed interest in" *identity* (*Collected Writings* 238)—renders him a difficult author to corral using Edwards' frame of internationalist Black Marxist aesthetics.

⁵¹ For more on the agency of novels and other "non-human actors," see Rita Felski, "The Agency of Non-Human Actors," talk delivered at Rutgers University, Thursday, November 3, 2011. For background on Actor-Network Theory, which grounds Felski's literary-critical intervention on behalf of the elements of diegetic and aesthetic worlds as agents in and of themselves, see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

CHAPTER 2

This Myth Which Is Not One:

The Legend of Jean Rhys and the Fiction of “Inferior Being”

Out of her fidelity to her experience, and her purity as a novelist, Jean Rhys thirty to forty years ago identified many of the themes that engage us today: isolation, an absence of society or community, the sense of things falling apart, dependence, loss.... Her books may serve current causes, but she is above causes. What she has written she has endured, over a long life; and what a stoic thing she makes the act of writing appear. —V. S. Naipaul¹

But what happens if you don't hope any more, if your back's broken? What happens then? ... And how do you know what it's like to try to speak from under water when you're drowned? —Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*²

If I said I was English they at once contradicted me—or implied a contradiction—no [you're] a colonial—you're not English—[an] *inferior being*.... If on the other hand I'd say exasperated I'm not English as a matter of fact I'm not a bit. I would rather be French or Spanish they'd get even more annoyed at that. I was [a] traitor. You're British—neither one thing nor the other. Heads you win tails I lose.

—Rhys, “The Black Exercise Book”³

Introduction

In this chapter, I look at the fictions of multi-hyphenate author Jean Rhys—a Welsh-Dominican modernist woman writer—specifically through the concept of the misfit minority as a literary and cultural sensibility. This sensibility reflects varied experiences of double exile from majority culture and minoritarian outlook, including, in Rhys, that of colonial subjection, sexual subordination, and racial privilege. The complexities of Rhys'

multiple cultural positions make her, more than any other novelist in my study, an important site for the elaboration of the misfit minority point of view in its development in the twentieth century, as a shadow cast by the modern narrative of liberation. Rhys talks of this misfit cultural position as the sense of “inferior being,” as noted in the epigraph. Rhys’ work dedicates itself to the fictional examination of such images of spoiled identity, in the words of Erving Goffman, in multiple, often politically conflicting, and particularly intense forms.⁴ Ford Madox Ford originally identified this penchant for showing the shadows of modern socially marginal subjects as Rhys’ “terrifying insight” and her “terrific ... almost lurid! passion for stating the case of the underdog.”⁵ But, Rhys states the case of the underdog not in arbitrary ways, but according to politically resonant historical and cultural contexts. Her misfits are underdogs due to their minoritarian social status, such as the early fictions’ depiction of deracinated female characters who become “fallen” due to systemic political and economic forces of late colonial modernity.

The early fiction helps us see the author’s “passion” for orphaned Creole misfits in London or impoverished bohemian vagabonds in the Parisian expatriate scene of the 1920s. The consistent focus on “inferior being” distinguishes Rhys’ work, and her limning of feelings of negative social existence showcase her narrative refusal to adhere to social norms. As we will see, these social norms shadow majority culture and minoritarian subjects all the same, specifically in the sense of the expectations of agency and autonomy incumbent on modern personhood. The second misfit minority dimension, beyond a critique of self-possessed agency and aggrandized sense of agency is the focus on negative feelings, and the concomitant refusal of cultural belonging, optimism, and uplift.

Rhys began writing in the early 1910s. And her long career spans the history of social movements such as decolonization, the second wave of feminism, and the sexual revolution. Yet, her early fiction depicts “inferior being” to such a degree of social alienation and cultural resonance that they leave no doubt as to their pessimism. More pointedly, Rhys’ identity as a modernist, West Indian woman writer allows her work to explore the contradictions that attend the misfit minority. Such a position of double exile is figured by Rhys protagonists, such as the privileged Creole female protagonist who identifies with Blackness, yet suffers extremes of sexual subordination, at times of her own making.

Rhys’ championing of the “case of the underdog” lies at the heart of her multiple inflections of this figure. Such cases of “inferior being,” beyond documenting the colonial shame of a West Indian subject in the imperial centers of Paris and London, also track the exigencies of patriarchal gender norms and mixed-class locations in the context of Left Bank bohemia. Although gender is the principal lens through which “inferior being” is represented in Rhys’ early fiction, especially the main focus of this chapter, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), the cultural significance of racialization and colonization complicates any easy understanding of the Rhys protagonist figure as a mere victim. The minority in the Rhys archive is a privileged ethnic-cultural location—the Creole plantation-owning class of former slave-owners—that renders the politics of Rhys’ fiction as thorny and complex for our times as it was for hers. Rhys, more than any other author in this study, illustrates the politically challenging sensibility of the misfit minority figure. Subverting modern gender norms, Rhys’ literary representation has been recuperated as a feminist critique of

patriarchy. And, as a chronicle of what Timothy Bewes calls postcolonial shame, her literary work has been recuperated as anti-imperialist.⁶ Yet, both political judgments seem to gloss over the thorniness of Rhys' dogged excavation of states of "inferior being," the misfit figures she focused on. Her misfits are always in some way minorities—historically and culturally marginalized underdogs—always shadowed by their status as exiles, from racial and colonial schemas, to metropolitan class-gender norms of English femininity as fallen women or failed New Women, as we see in *Voyage in the Dark*.

Rhys' literary sensibility renders a unique portrait of the misfit minority position as well as a critique of "fictions of development," in Jed Esty's phrase, depicting a narrative of self-actualization based on Western notions of liberal autonomy and self-possessive personhood.⁷ This sensibility is depicted in the narratives' properties of affective negativity, pessimism, and antisocial impersonality, as well as in formal innovations with point of view, non-teleological emplotment, and the protagonists' childlike passivity. These qualities are shared by all the texts in my study, and together they trace the misfit minority as a twentieth-century literary figure and cultural position, who refuses to seek solace in the embrace of identitarian solidarity or communal uplift. The danger in generalizing about social reality from novels is well known, but the key is to encompass not simply diegetic worlds in Rhys, but also the "real life" experiences and social worlds she draws on and transfigures in literary narrative form, and as an author-function in her own right.

My hunch is that such misfits are among us, and this is why seeking out the figure of double exile is important. Such disqualified states of feeling as an "inferior being," entail feeling inadequate and isolated from dominant as well as minoritarian communities,

whether by choice or by necessity. The position of double exile is a complex assemblage, if not a structure in the strict Marxian sense, of feelings that requires further critically elaboration, which is the goal of this study as a whole.⁸ A widespread stigma prevents the rehabilitation of such a position. Double exile seems to redound on the figures that incorporate this condition, rather than on the norms of collectivity that tend to produce this abjected constituent outsider.

The misfit minority is thus an especially stigmatized position, especially given the twentieth-century's advances in the liberation movements of former colonies, African American civil rights, women's rights and the sexual revolution, and gay liberation in developing uplifting imagined communities. Communities of minoritarian groups share as their *raison d'être* the alleviation of isolation and marginalization through the political advocacy for a collective subject. So-called minorities who retain a "misfit" sensibility remain unreconstructed or, perhaps more to the point, are ideologically represented as unreconstructed, as impediments or as superseded alternatives of subjectivity in the minoritarian mode. This mode, which I borrow in part from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, entails a decidedly anti-imperial subject position, that resists overcoming, or the minority fiction of development. The latter forecloses and occludes alternate realities of marginal yet vibrant lives, fictional or otherwise.⁹

Early Fictions of "Inferior Being"

The early novels have conventionally been linked together as representing a cycle of the "Rhysian protagonist," a composite character known as passive, self-abnegating, and self-destructive, if not masochistic. My analysis intervenes in the debates over how to read

this figure in the early fiction, and, more broadly, examines Rhys' mythic author-function, as a meta-textual shadow in the archive.¹⁰ As in Naipaul's comment in the epigraph, the history of Rhys' critical reception often turns on the question of how to interpret the persistent antisociality, negativity, passivity, and self-abnegation that define Rhys' fiction.

I use my conception of the misfit minority to identify the double valence of Rhys' representation of underdogs under the sign of social and cultural nonconformism, in the context of the complex politics of her work in terms of gender, race, class, and empire. To call her representations "minorities" is to miss the centrality of gender—in the subversion of class- and race-based gender norms, and the critique of politico-economic structures of patriarchy—in the Rhys oeuvre. But, by the same token, to miss the importance of racialized minority identification in her work is to misunderstand the challenging and contradictory ways her fictions represent racialized difference, as well as how her function as an author has been contested within the context of Caribbean cultural politics of representation. For the fiction—from the short-story collection *The Left Bank* to *Wide Sargasso Sea*—centers on the ruins of the plantation class in the Caribbean, as well as on the psychic and social toll borne by refugees from these colonies who migrate to Europe.¹¹

These figures of Rhys' misfits are postcolonial, racialized, "vaguely" non-European women: what defines them most is their not fitting into any available Eurocentric cultural models of female subjectivity.¹² Two such cultural models obtain most in my extended reading on Rhys' first written novel, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), wherein the figures of the New Woman and the fallen woman both seem to shadow the life choices of the protagonist, Anna Morgan. Seen as the character most like the younger Rhys herself, Anna Morgan, as

in the main figures of the other novels, finds herself abjectly liberated from neocolonial middle-class maternal and matrimonial roles. But this situation of falling out of bourgeois gender and class propriety, along with a prehistory as a postcolonial figure, renders these protagonists as seeming victims of the early-twentieth-century context of misogyny, classism, and open-ended racism of cosmopolitan European society Rhys depicts so stringently in her modernist fictions. Anna Morgan, as is Marya Zelli, Julia Martin, and Sasha Jansen, become deeply dependent on their male lovers, and thus become “tarts” or “kept women,” as we see in the four early novels, respectively: *Quartet* (1929); *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1930); *Voyage in the Dark* (1934); and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939).¹³ These fictions, shockingly for their time, as Naipul suggests in the epigraph, resist neocolonial sex-gender norms of respectable Anglo-Caribbean and British femininity, and embrace the “dark” worlds of bohemia and the demi-monde. Rhys’ fictional representations hearken back to patriarchal cultural models—the “oldest professional” model, most commonly—of non-bourgeois feminine positioning, as represented in the French Naturalist tradition. For example, Anna Morgan reads Emile Zola’s *Nana*, in a direct intertextual link to her own situation as an unmarried chorus girl. But she finds Zola’s novel unrealistic and offensive, and there we begin to see Rhys’ resistance to colonialist patriarchal stereotypes of the fallen woman, stereotypes that are deeply and problematically racialized in her novels about Creole and Black female characters.

The main argument in this chapter is that the author-function “Jean Rhys” functions as a metonymy for the narrative about her literary career, as one focus of this chapter is how her work has been read: as a fiction of development. My intervention is in a)

displaying what is wrong about such a critical predilection if not addressed head-on, meaning that, b) such a predilection turns on the critical history's developmental narrative of Rhys as an artist and her oeuvre itself as such. Exposing this double teleology illuminates something fundamental about the subaltern poetics and politics of misfit-minority subjects. And that is, the meta-story about Rhys and her work, written as triumphant developmental narratives, privileges a triumphalist vision of minoritarian subjectivity, the narrative of liberation, at the expense of cultural forgetting, of distancing from the material and symbolic resonances of minoritarian impasse, failure, and persistence in, even complicity with, internalized systems of oppression. What value cultural forgetting holds for the misfit minority figure of double exile is a key question for this project as a whole.

I am not disputing the prevailing notion that, in the early novels, Rhys' protagonists represent at best ambiguously political, or, at worst, misogynistic significance in their hyper-passivity and "feminine" dependency on powerful male figures, their consistent characterization as weak fallen women. Yet, for the purposes of this study, it is the Rhys archive itself and the author-function projected within it.

The second half of this chapter develops this binocular focus by reconsidering the politics of gender subversion and the theme of the misfit minority in Rhys' early fiction, specifically *Voyage in the Dark* (written before 1914).¹⁴ Rhys' narrative figures are legible as perennial nonconformists against variable backdrops of modern European norms: both those linked to the transformations of class, race, and gender, written within a frame of transatlantic history and neocolonialism. Anna Morgan, of Morgan's Rest, her family's ruined plantation estate, belongs to a former slaveowning class being written out of history

(according to Esty's analysis), but whose gender and racial norms she is subject to, as a young "subwhite" orphan woman in England.¹⁵ Like the other protagonists in the early novels, Morgan displays a radically rootless and marginal positioning with regard to Englishness, racial identification, and heteropatriarchal neocolonialist attitudes both in London and in the periphery. The modernist novels' protagonists are notorious for being passive and weak, perennially failing to conform to prevailing norms of social subjectivity and even adult personhood: unlike her associates, Anna Morgan is not fully "modern," as a self-determined new woman, but neither is she comfortably situated within the norms of the "kept" or "fallen" woman.¹⁶ And, finally, Morgan does not belong to the privileged formerly slaveowning Caribbean caste of respectable Creole femininity, as personified in her stepmother Hester, Morgan's only link to her father's ruined plantation. These protagonists do not conform in terms of class respectability, in their louche relationships with married men, their occupations as "tarts" and "kept women," and their deracination from familial and matrimonial institutions. Rhys' protagonists, and the early novels that they inhabit, seem to function beyond this originary historical moment, continuing to haunt our own present concerns regarding gender, marginality, postcoloniality, and minoritarian subjecthood, and continuing to shape what I call the "Rhys myth," or the author-function as it evolved through the twentieth century. My chapter thus focuses on Rhys' mythic authorial function, and on the misfit-minority figure of "inferior being" as represented in the poetics and politics of self-abnegation of the Rhysian protagonist, whose iterative representations pose a critical problem and controversy.

Much of the debate turns on whether to understand Rhys in terms of oppositional politics, where her fiction, in the Naturalist vein, illuminates the gender, class, racial, and colonial power structures that symbolically strangle her protagonists. This is what I consider the dominant and redemptive political reading of Rhys. Another way of reading Rhys is as perpetuating stereotypes of female submission and passivity, as well as of Caribbean race relations, rather than positing the transformative oppositional power of her fatalistic vision. The hermeneutic circle is either vicious or virtuous, depending on the kind of political orientation and aesthetic agency critics ascribe to Rhys' fictional texts. One way to look at it is that the villain in the piece is "the social," and Rhys is the (authorial) "heroine," and the texts are powerful records of the oppressive power of social "victimization." An opposite way of looking at it is that Rhys' fictional texts are representations of "victimhood" and not of victimization; her texts perpetuate narratives of female subordination and are not recoverable as transgressively faithful documents of social oppression.

My intervention is to note the gap between these positions and attempt to reconstitute the debate as follows. In what sense is the political, when rendered in personal terms, no longer recoverable as political (the victimhood narrative)? Or, which amounts to the same thing, in what sense is the personal, rendered in political terms, the only way to recuperate such narratives (the victimization narrative)? Why does the value of Rhys' fictional representations, in the critical history and the surrounding metatext, or "Rhys myth," turn on whether they are available to critics of various ideological persuasions as politically efficacious? Why does a minoritarian author, in this case the postcolonial

modernist Rhys, need to perform a diagnostic function (of social power) in order for critics to justify her tales of female disempowerment as properly feminist? Can the deeply gendered, classed, racialized, and (internally and externally) colonized dimensions of her texts function only at the level of the political to indemnify the incredible weakness, the underdog status—in short, the misfit minority—of Rhys’ protagonist? In other words, why does the early work provoke and divide critics and, more importantly, why does it maintain a fugitive, indeterminate quality, which challenges critics and supporters both, as an index of Rhys’ radical, or regressive, aesthetic politics?

Rhys’ fictions, although recoverable as allegories of feminist and postcolonial oppression, are also aesthetically resonant in and of themselves, and challenging to a limited kind of political analysis, which turns on whether the politics of a work or an author are “progressive” or “reactionary.”¹⁷ This chapter stages an encounter with Rhys’ “rich and strange” early works, in the words of Marianne DeKoven¹⁸—rich and strange, and not easily domesticated as allegories for reading an all-too-narrow notion of the political in the aesthetic, an operation that subjugates aesthetic texts to the colonial gesture of imposing an interpretive order on texts that consistently elude and evade coherent interpretation.¹⁹

Rhys’ own *Quartet* notes the “mania for classification” that is the hallmark of the brutal patriarch, H.J. Heidler (11). That, perhaps, is the crux of Rhys’ tales of “inferior being”: that Rhys’ fiction dares the reader to confront and live within the contours of negative affects and conditions that have no repair, no transcendent significance—indeed, her novels refuse any of these redemptive gestures. Instead, Rhys constructs a world of hurt, which readers and critics alike seem drawn to, yet forced for the same reason to explain it (away).

Rather than explaining it, or explaining it away, this chapter will dive into the wreck, in Adrienne Rich's words, of Rhys' fiction, notably the first novel she composed, *Voyage in the Dark*, and its representations of a postcolonial, misfit minority protagonist set adrift in England in the 1910s.²⁰

These manifestations fall under the concept of the misfit-minority sensibility. And, as we will see in Rhys' case specifically, they focus on a neocolonial class-race-gender nonconformism, mixing gender and class resistance and subordination with the ambiguous representation of trans-racial identification in *Voyage in the Dark*. This novel's depictions of this theme centers on subversion of English norms of femininity, as in the fallen woman and the New Woman. But Rhys' fiction offers so much more: sexualized, racialized, and gender melancholia, postcolonial shame, and negative affects, self-abnegation, and attenuated autonomy and agency. In my study, this "grammar" of abject feelings is a hallmark of the misfit minority position of double exile. Rhys, as a perennial vagabond, as well as postcolonial exile, bohemian from the West Indies, and modernist woman writer lacking many of the supportive communities of the second wave feminist movement, exemplifies the authorial position of double exile of the misfit minority. This chapter will therefore trace the fictional representation of Rhys' sensibility as a misfit minority writer. Rhys, in my view, is a master of chronicling the double exile and the grammar of abject feelings of negative existence or "inferior being." Her depictions of these states of being frustrate critical attempts to rehabilitate them into allegories of political opposition.²¹

Classroom Interlude

My first year of graduate school, in a seminar on Cosmopolitan Modernism, we were reading Rhys' *Quartet*. Although I was new to the English graduate program, I was not shy about participating in class—even if sometimes my comments fell wide off the mark. During the Rhys discussion, our Professor—a glamorous and excellent teacher—asked a question regarding the possible intentions of the author regarding Marya Zelli, *Quartet*'s hapless protagonist. She asked (and I paraphrase): Why does the author represent Marya and her milieu such that she seems helpless and passive, rendering her a victim of the powerful Heidlers (the married couple, Hugh [H. J.] and Lois), who welcome Marya as their indefinite houseguest under ulterior motives; namely, to turn her into Hugh's mistress with Lois's tacit approval)?²² As always reading against the grain, I raised my hand to answer this fundamental question, which applies to all of Rhys' novels with the exception of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.²³ My response was that perhaps Rhys was also locating some of the “blame”—if this is the right word for what readers respond to in Rhys' focus on feeling like an “inferior being”—in the figure of Marya herself. Is it possible, my point was, that the novel also looks at Marya's complicity in the soul-killing ménage-à-trois with H.J. and Lois (as Lois, too, is complicit in the arrangement)? The professor, very gently, simply looked at me and said, “No,” in an affective mixture of sympathy (for shooting down my point) and empathy (for shooting down my point). No, it was not possible, in other words, in the space of this seminar, for the author or the narrative of *Quartet* to in some way locate in the passivity of Marya herself some of the onus for allowing herself to be enthralled by H.J., despite her initial misgivings and the increasingly sordid and bitter acrimony that define the domestic arrangement. No, the novel can only situate the onus for Marya's victimization in

the larger world of the Heidlrs—their false bohemianism and H. J.’s paternalistic mania for classification (118). I found it curious that there was this seemingly evident impossibility in interpretation, a rare notion in the larger critical world.

The Legend of Jean Rhys

What I did not know then was the long history of misogynist and anti-feminist readings of Rhys’ fiction, which located the “blame” in the main characters—and in Rhys herself.²⁴ As Mary Lou Emery notes in *World’s End*, “the ‘marginalized’ female protagonists in Rhys’ early novels ‘can be read sympathetically as victims of ‘the social structure’ or of ‘patriarchal oppression.’” Nevertheless, their apparent complicity in their own oppression remains to disturb readers, and psychological diagnoses of passivity, masochism, and even schizophrenia have become a critical commonplace” (xii). In light of the classroom anecdote above, it is easy to see the two camps arguing for the narratives’ feminist politics or for their protagonists’ “apparent complicity in their own oppression,” which, to this day, haunt the critical reception of Rhys’ early novels. But Emery goes on to stake her claim. And that is, the importance of “reading Rhys’ fiction as West Indian literature,” as postcolonial literature. Elsewhere Emery cites Spivak’s “Three Women’s Texts,” a critical intervention in the canonization of Rhys as a postcolonial feminist.²⁵ Emery does so in order to resituate Rhys within a “cultural and historical context outside of the strictly European,” a political mode of reading that Emery states “offers possibilities of interpretation that go beyond the psychological,” which is how many critics of the

modernist era read the early novels: as perverse narratives of merely personal, or “psychological,” feminine pathology (xii).²⁶

Interestingly, in the wake of Spivak’s influential essay, Emery’s reading in “*World’s End*” is a testament to the recuperation and relocation of Rhys within a firmly feminist, postcolonial, West Indian canon. What took critics so long? One might ask. Emery provides a clue. She argues for the double-voiced aesthetic presence of “two intonations” in *Voyage in the Dark*, for example. One aesthetic voice is the “style of female irony that registers both the attempt and the failure,” “the expectation and the disillusionment” of building feminist “resistance and community” in the novel, this irony becoming the sole “companion of an isolated and alienated female protagonist” (xiv). The other style is “a communal satirical laughter that derives from the Caribbean carnival” (xiv). Emery concludes this revealing passage with the seemingly offhand observation: “The tension between the two intonations, muted in the three other early novels, partakes also of an exploration of subjectivity that seeks an alternative to that of the European novel” (xiv).

Voyage in the Dark is an interesting example for such “Third World feminist” readings of Rhys’ fiction, especially given its discrepant temporality within the series of the so-called “European novels.” *Voyage in the Dark* today is seen heroically, as Rhys’ liberation from the form and European aesthetic that implicitly mars the other novels—*Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, and *Good Morning, Midnight*. For, as Emery notes, the voice of the West Indian Carnival is “muted” indeed in these other works. Even as they figure “protagonists of vague nationality,” these novels are read today as repressing their West Indian origins—origins that attach to these texts despite the author’s

complicated attachment to said origins. I would summarize the reception history since the 1990s as Rhys' meta-literary figure coming out of the darkness, from the Eurocentric milieus of *Quartet*; *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*; and *Good Morning, Midnight* to the postcolonial or "Creole Atlantic" consciousness of *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In a recent essay on "plantation Americas" depicted in Rhys' work, Emery writes that "even her most European or "continental" novels and short stories depict the legacies of the plantation" ("Poetics of Labor" 167). Note Emery's recuperation of "*even* [Rhys'] most European ... novels" as "depict[ing] the legacies of the plantation." Rhys is seemingly always being rescued by her sympathetic readers, and fits uneasily—Emery even uses the term "misfit" to describe the ambiguities of Rhys' intersectional cultural positioning:

A crossroads figure, Jean Rhys appears in critical discussions of Caribbean, modernist, postcolonial and women's literature, *yet, in each case, remains marginal to the field*. This "*mis-fit*" speaks to the eccentricity of her fiction yet also to its power, located at the intersections of significant literary traditions, critical approaches, and historical transformations. (167; emphasis added)

Emery does not develop her use of the notion of "mis-fit" in this piece on labor. Rather, as a longtime reader of Rhys, Emery helps situate the Rhys archive—both Continental and Caribbean fiction, as we will see shortly—in the "margins" of each field it intersects. A conception of Rhys herself is here defined as a "crossroads figure."

Esty's book on the British modernist bildungsroman includes what he terms the anti-bildungsroman, a tradition he locates Jean Rhys within. Briefly, Esty argues that Rhys, as a quintessentially modernist writer, disrupts the progressive temporality of the bildungsroman. Rhys' anti-developmental narratives instead focus on devolution, regression, and impasse, specifically tracing a backward movement in the narrative arc of

her protagonists—as I would add, these fictions likewise trace “backward” feelings and states of mind.²⁷ Esty’s treatment of the modernist deconstruction, for lack of a better term, of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman, makes interesting claims regarding Rhys’ biopolitical rendering of female subjectivity under the masculinist socioeconomic regimes of truth and power in early-twentieth-century Britain and Western European capitals (Paris, Amsterdam, Vienna). Rhys, according to Esty, represents the gendered corporeality of power and discipline, in scenes of her protagonists’ physical withdrawal from society, into alcoholic haze, or passive acquiescence to powerful and brutal male lovers. It is these lovers who “smash them up,”²⁸ as is the case of Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark*, whose youthful innocence is sacrificed by the cool seduction and cruel abandonment of Walter Jeffries, who tires of her and leaves her with no option but to seek help with an unwanted pregnancy. The abortion that closes that novel is emblematic of what Esty considers the biopolitical valence of the anti-bildungsroman that characterizes Rhys’ novelistic production as a whole. That is to say, the abortion that closes the novel symbolizes the anti-developmental structure of the Rhysian plot, its foreclosure of what Lee Edelman terms reproductive futurity, refusing to end with child and maternal recuperation of female subjection.²⁹ Morgan’s culturally devalued female corporeality exists within a sex-gender system predicated on male domination of the systematic vulnerability of early-twentieth-century female sexuality with regard to reproductive capability. Morgan is left to her own devices when Jeffries, who is two decades older, abandons her.

I touch on this controversy below, but for now I would like to present the central focus of this chapter, which departs from Esty’s characterization of Rhys’ oeuvre. I agree

with Esty that, formally speaking, Rhysian novels tend to display a counter-developmental or degenerative impulse, refusing the patrilineal platitudes of realist plots centered on the gendered domestic sphere. But Esty's fine analysis misses a larger point about Rhys—as a corpus of novels that span the early to mid-twentieth-century, and as a developmental metanarrative, given the attention her own life has received as the main inspiration for her fiction. Rhys' myth comprises a meta-narrative that includes the novels, memoirs, autobiography and biographies, book reviews, interviews, critical commentary, and so on; in short, the whole Rhys industry, or the apparatuses that have produced the Rhys myth for public and critical consumption. The Rhys mythos is absolutely one of narrative and aesthetic development. “Jean Rhys,” as an aesthetic text in her own right, which includes the function of celebrity and cultural capital in twentieth-century literary systems of value and prestige—is a veritable *bildungsroman*. Esty's argument regarding Rhys is right on the particulars but does not take into account the aesthetic meta-narrative regarding Rhys. This mythic meta-narrative is an aesthetic pattern in its own right. And, beyond the controversy regarding the feminism (or lack thereof) of her representations, this legend articulates Rhys' itinerary as an author of development, from her early days as an “amateur” literary writer to a master of the form and a champion of the gendered and postcolonial politics of her final novel. This narrative of development is so entrenched, as I show below, that it is hard to see Rhys as anything but the avatar of a developing aesthetic point of view that encompasses her life story, her fiction, the “composite heroine,” and Rhys' inescapable celebrity and author-function.

This meta-narrative is succinctly put forward by various critics and reviewers, who argue that Rhys' early novels lack the political grounding in, or even thematic engagement with, postcoloniality that her later work evinces. But the best warrant for my broader claim about Rhys' mythic authorial function as a meta-fictional bildungsroman—indeed, a legend—is a seemingly trivial editorial decision. Regarding her decision to begin *The Complete Novels* with *Voyage in the Dark*, Diana Athill explains her reasoning as follows: *Voyage in the Dark* was “put first ... for two reasons. It was written ... long before [Rhys] wrote anything else.”³⁰ And

its central figure, Anna Morgan [was] created out of experiences which her author underwent within a few years of coming to school in England in 1907. Jean came from the West Indies, where she was born in 1890. Anna shared Jean's childhood in Dominica, her life as a chorus girl in a touring company, her first love affair, and the affair's end in an abortion, and in a rejection which was humiliating as well as heart-breaking. (Ibid)

Athill's editorial reconstruction of the Rhys corpus in the posthumously published *Complete and Early Novels* thus operates according to the biographical principle that dominates Rhys reception and the author's self-representation in numerous interviews. Athill admits to placing *Voyage* first in the novel collection not only because it was the first novel Rhys conceived (though published after much revision). Athill also places *Voyage* first in the series because it represents the earliest biographical details: Rhys' years as a chorus girl in England after leaving Roseau, Dominica, at the age of 16, as well as the doomed love affair with Lancelot Grey Hugh Smith and its aftermath.³¹ By so doing, Athill underwrites the correspondence of Rhys' fiction with a metafictional figure, the “composite heroine,” that supposedly unites the protagonists of the early novels, with only names and settings changing around them. This treatment differs from more-canonical woman modernist

writers, such as Woolf and Stein, insofar as these last are at this point chiefly celebrated for their formal experimentation and mastery or innovation of the techniques of literary high modernism. Rhys, on the other hand, as we see below, is now chiefly noted for her political resonance, writing back to the empire and to British heteropatriarchy; her formal mastery is all but forgotten, despite this being the *chief point of interest* in her early reception.

The myth of the composite heroine that Athill underwrites in re-ordering the novelistic corpus follows the biographical reception pattern established during the “rediscovery” phase of Rhys’ career by the writer Francis Wyndham. Rhys’ co-discoverer after the lost years of World War II, Wyndham is most responsible for the Rhys *künstler*-myth, which unites the authorial legend with her fictions and the whole aesthetic order under the rubric of a Rhys “composite heroine” both at the level of fictional figures and authorial legend. For it was Wyndham who famously introduced a Cold War transatlantic readership to Rhys by prefacing the first published selections from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which appeared in *Art and Literature* (1964).³² Wyndham’s biographical representation of the author to a literary public is based on a resilient notion of a composite “Rhys heroine.” Such a framing remains central to the evergreen Rhys myth as well as to publications of the novel to this day.³³ Elgin Mellown, the first critic to write a book-length study of Rhys, says this about Wyndham and the latter’s influential construction of the Rhys myth through the positing of the composite heroine: “Wyndham ... point[s] always to the fact that the heroines form one composite figure” (170–71). Mellown adds that Wyndham’s account “has consequently been the most important influence on the reception of Jean Rhys and has helped to shape most of the critical attitudes to her work” (171).

The Rhys myth takes the shape of a legend at the level of authorial presence, and bildungsroman at the level of literary corpus, standards of literary value, and political—cultural significance, building to the aesthetic climax of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the latter, her most famous and easily most influential novel, Rhys comes into her own as a postcolonial writer and “plantation modernist,” after the literary apprenticeship writing in European capitals during the 1920s and 1930s.³⁴ Yet, Rhys’ legend stands as an intervening metafiction, both subject and product, bildungsheld and bildungsroman, of a feminist legend, at odds with the formal, thematic, and affective textures of the novels themselves.³⁵

The importance of this intervention lies in noticing this discrepancy, which highlights the extent to which the Rhys archive has been overwritten, its earlier novels superseded by a triumph of political subjectivity in the majoritarian mode that suspends the “backward feelings” of earlier minoritarian subjects, thus hopelessly cast out as historical anomalies, and at worst erased from history. As a case in point: Rhys’ earlier novels literally went out of print before the triumph of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Esty’s limning of the earlier novel represents an important intervention in this collective act of cultural forgetting, which, as Heather Love argues, displaces the “bad old days” as strictly in the past, and forgets that the past, to quote the famous Faulknerism, is not even past. To reorient the Rhys archive toward the earlier fictions means to interrogate the predominance of the critical history’s developmental narrative. But, more importantly for my project as whole, to combat the predominance of triumphalist visions of the “liberated woman,” in Nancy Fulton’s phrase about Rhys’s *later* works, is to reorient ourselves to understanding the ongoing stigma that minoritarian populations and subjects negotiate everyday: not even

past. Esty and other recent critics notwithstanding, so far, the reception history demonstrates how central to our understanding of Rhys is this legend of Rhys-the-author as a developing figure, or figure of literary development; and how central is this metafiction of the Rhysian composite figure, itself derived from a corpus of novelistic representations based on the author's own life. And, how central is this narrative of development to minoritarian fictions in the twentieth century.

Ultimately, the Rhys archive—fiction and nonfiction, interviews and notebooks, biographies and autobiographical writings alike—recapitulates an intersubjective and aesthetic assemblage of feelings in her most sympathetic and unsympathetic readers and critics. I use the term “recapitulate” because these structures of feeling seem uncannily reminiscent of those traced by Rhys’ works themselves. It is, moreover, hard to disentangle the various narrative levels that reinforce one another to construct an image of text and context, figure and ground, in each other’s likeness. Rhys’ fiction in particular inspires a heroic rescue fantasy in her sympathetic critics and readers. Many of them are deeply invested in recuperating Rhys’ feminist politics—as am I. This is why I would like to reconsider the feminist debate surrounding the political status of such novels as *Quartet* or *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, which feature her most unredeemable protagonists, who lie simply as “doormats in a world of boots.”³⁶

Few scholars have picked up on the larger critical question I tackle in this chapter: an overarching critical meta-narrative of the Rhys “figure,” as Emery terms it, as an artist-in-development and a West Indian feminist subject, coming into political consciousness as a postcolonial writer in the Sixties.³⁷ A notable exception, Carol Dell’Amico challenges the

developmental meta-fiction of Rhys in terms of Rhys' engagement with colonialism, arguing that from the first book, Rhys wrote about the legacies of the plantation society in the West Indies and the Caribbean diaspora on the European continent. Dell'Amico writes that Rhys' "importance as a colonial voice within the postmodern is well established, thanks largely to *Wide Sargasso Sea*," adding, however, that Rhys' "status as a colonial voice (if not a feminist one) within the modern ... is less secure," mainly "because her fictions have been distinguished as being either 'Caribbean' or 'European' ... [and] any colonial allusions or contexts of the European novels are considered incidental to the texts." Dell'Amico's central claim contests this binary division, which, as I argue, constructs the Rhys author-function as a narrative of artistic development as well as political self-actualization. This critical meta-narrative construes the authorial itinerary of Rhys as a postcolonial author. Dell'Amico's book exposes the "predominant perception of Rhys as only intermittently engaged with colonial questions," asserting that all of Rhys' novels are "shaped by the insights and concerns she developed as a displaced colonial and outsider." In my terms, Rhys' "displaced colonial" "insights" are those of a misfit-minority writer experiencing double exile. In Rhys' case specifically, her double exile from British bourgeois femininity and domesticity (the fallen woman figure), as well as her emphasis on, and subsequent voluntary exile from, the West Indies as a woman writer (as opposed to the European liberal-feminism of her antipode, *Jane Eyre*). We should read the infamous "weakness" of her protagonists as evincing an ambivalence toward the politics of the New Woman in the early twentieth century—her single-minded focus on underdog figures of

“inferior being,” misfit minorities, whose significance contemporary critics are only now beginning to appreciate.

Dell’Amico’s note is instructive, insofar as she quite clearly establishes the critical commonplace of the Rhysian legend, and by so doing reinforces my argument regarding what you might call the dominant developmental way of reading represented by the critical history. Her endnote asserts that “the general perception” that Rhys “is a colonial voice ... mainly in the postmodern [era] remains” (121n). Dell’Amico adds that “the notion that Rhys develops as a colonial thinker over time, coming into her own finally in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is a commonplace of the criticism” (Ibid; emphasis added). Needless to say, Dell’Amico contests this developmental thesis on the grounds that Rhys constitutes a “colonial voice” consistently throughout the fiction.

Dell’Amico demonstrates this consistency in Rhys’ fiction, and inconsistency in Rhys scholarship. She does this by adducing evidence from various Rhys critics whose demonstrations of what I consider the meta-text of the Rhysian legend are self-conflicting. About one representative critic, Dell’Amico claims, “[Judith] Raikin’s readings of the modernist period colonial fictions appears to contradict *this version of Rhys’ development*” (121–22n1; emphasis added).³⁸ Dell’Amico shows how Raikin’s own reading finds a sophisticated and engaged treatment of colonial and West Indian diasporic themes in the early short stories and novels, while Raikin’s reading nevertheless seems to corroborate, and be underwritten by, an unexamined intertext, the myth of Rhys as protagonist of her own meta-fictional legend.

Such critical self-contradiction, I would argue, governs how we read the Rhys fictional archive: that is to say, as a (meta-) fiction of development. This meta-narrative, as I have suggested, entails that Rhys' Continental fiction of the 1920s and 1930s "mainly," as Dell'Amico notes, neglects the postcolonial in favor of the euro-cosmopolitan. And yet, as she rightly points out, this is not the case. From the earliest fiction, Rhys always mixed themes and textures, eras and locales. *The Left Bank* includes richly textured stories about the West Indian diaspora in Paris and about life in the Antilles, such as "Again the Antilles" and the harrowing memoir-style "Mixing Cocktails," respectively, both originally appearing in the first collection and later re-anthologized in the second, *Tigers Are Better Looking* (1968).³⁹ As Dell'Amico adds, this

influentially argued idea ... most certainly inhibits the amount of attention Rhys' early colonial fictions receive, regardless of the numerous readings proving these fictions no less insightful than *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This notion ... significantly underwrites the polarization of the overtly colonial ("Caribbean" or "West Indian") fictions, and the rest (the "European" or "Continental" ones). (122n1)

And yet, this "influential idea," what I consider the dominant aesthetic meta-narrative regarding Rhys, continues to circulate, seemingly by force of an unconscious that I deem hermeneutic, but which could also be termed, following Fredric Jameson's own influential idea, the political unconscious.⁴⁰ Why political? Because this track of the Rhys fiction of development insists, as Dell'Amico suggests, that "Rhys' writing"—and Rhys *herself*, or the myth of Rhys—"is a gradually realized colonial project," which, according to Emery's influential account, "emerge[s] fully only in *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (122n1). Thus, a political and hermeneutic unconscious seems to demand that Rhys' fiction originate with a modernist sensibility and end with the post—Second World War, and, hence, with the

legitimated postcolonial “West Indian fiction” of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the later story collections *Tigers Are Better Looking* and *Sleep It Off Lady* (1976).⁴¹ The ruse of periodization here seems to neglect the evidence to the contrary—that Rhys’ modernist-era fiction also evinces an engagement with the politics and poetics of postcoloniality, and that the later successes seem to occlude Rhys’ earlier triumphs.

A related and equally influential critical perspective establishes the contours of the Rhys legend on aesthetic, rather than political, grounds. This canonizing viewpoint establishes evaluative norms of the Rhys canon in terms of the relative “literariness” of its constitutive parts. This meta-narrative of aesthetic development is reinforced by Athill, who writes, for instance, that in the beginning Rhys “was teaching herself, as she wrote ... how to turn personal experience into something of value to other people.”⁴² This view, too, frames Rhys’ career as an organic developmental process, though one tied not to the development of Rhys’ “colonial voice,” as we saw above, but to Rhys’ development as a literary artist. Not only does Rhys “develop” from being a modernist author to a postcolonial writer, but the developmental itinerary runs on this parallel track, evaluating Rhys’ powers as an author, establishing her 1960s and 1970s fiction as her literary as well as political self-actualization. We might thus read Emery’s quote about *Wide Sargasso Sea* alongside Athill’s introduction to *The Collected Short Stories* (“coming into her own finally in *Wide Sargasso Sea*”; Rhys “teaching herself” how to write). The politics and the poetics of Rhys’ fiction, then, according to this framing meta-narrative, “develop” in tandem, to become enriched by larger and deeper dimensions: in the dimension of the political, the development of a distinctly postcolonial diasporic consciousness, and in the aesthetic

dimension, a commensurate enrichment and deepening of the quality and texture of Rhys' fiction. From this vantage point, the author's modernist fictions—the novels set in Paris or London, but also the vignettes in *The Left Bank* that Ford gushed over—remain narrow in their themes and limited in their aesthetic accomplishment.

But this was not always the case. In their own time, Rhys' early novels were praised *mainly* in terms of their literary distinction and aesthetic accomplishment, despite their supposedly narrow scope (the seeming reiteration of the misfit "Rhys heroine"), not to mention their louche themes and bohemian milieus. Hence, according to this earlier reception history, the quartet of novels⁴³ represents formally minimalist, women-centered narratives of "the" Rhys protagonist at loose ends who ages naturally from one novel to the next, and only the names seem to change. Indeed, Wyndham claims that Sasha Jansen, of *Good Morning*, *Midnight* and thus the "last" figure in the early-novel series, "is the culmination of Jean Rhys' composite heroine" (9).⁴⁴ These novels have been presented as a unitary cycle retrospectively—that is to say, after Rhys' re-emergence. In their own time, the novels were framed by "literary London," in the words of one reviewer, as formally distinguished, while their content was deprecated as too dark and pessimistic. None other than Rebecca West decried Rhys' attachment to "misery," calling *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* "pitiful, but superb," in a characteristic formalist compliment.⁴⁵

Note, for instance, a contemporaneous review entitled "Vivisection," which praises the novel's "cold, impersonal precision," and Rhys' extraordinary skill, her lack of moral bias (neither for nor against the "fallen woman"), and her "cold," modernist sensibility: being neither gentle nor brutal, only "scientific."⁴⁶ The reviewer seemingly dismisses the

content as a “dismal tale [of] one of those pitiful women who start life with a lover and end by sinking into sordid shame.” The reviewer adds:

There must be some mysterious attraction in such a novel, or nobody would read it. It gives no pleasure. It does not afford the emotional release of tragedy. *If it has any really fine quality it is simply the quality of artistic fitness, form, and exactness of definition.* Miss Rhys has produced precisely the book she set out to write. In this nicety of adjustment between her aim and her accomplishment one may find something definite to admire. (Ibid, emphasis added)

The reviewer praises Rhys’ artistry though not her subject matter, echoing what Ford, in his preface to *The Left Bank*, famously called Rhys’ “singular instinct for form” (24).

Origins of the Rhys Myth

A demonstration of the genealogy of the teleological critical reading of Rhys’ major fiction is in order. And, as we have seen, this meta-narrative of development is articulated in political terms today and in aesthetic terms yesterday—and sometimes, as we see in the genealogical record that has built up the edifice of the Rhys myth, these readings overlay. A. Alvarez, one of Rhys’ most influential critics, whitewashing Rhys’ Caribbean heritage by calling her “the best living English novelist” in the *New York Times Book Review*, also frames her oeuvre as a developmental narrative of leading to cultural self-realization.⁴⁷

According to this dominant reading, *Wide Sargasso Sea* stands as the correction, sublation, and transcendence of the earlier novels, which, with the exception of *Voyage in the Dark*, do not engage Rhys’ Dominican origins and heritage. V. S. Naipul adds to the redemptive reading of Rhys as a postcolonial writer, which remains current to this day.⁴⁸ Mellown corroborates this reading on both counts—biographical progression and aesthetic development. According to Mellown, *Wide Sargasso Sea* “completes Jean Rhys’ world. It

fills in the West Indian scene and makes more explicit the background”—not only of Bertha’s madness, but “of the psychological disability of Miss Rhys’ protagonists,” as another early critic, Nancy Fulton, claims.⁴⁹ Fulton builds on Mellown to say that *Wide Sargasso Sea* “is the culmination of her previous works, for here she interweaves her various concerns: the alienation of the Creole in the Caribbean and England; the clash of English and Caribbean cultures; and the helplessness of women, raised to be sexual objects” (“*Sargasso Sea*” 341; added emphasis). Fulton’s other article on Rhys, in the same journal, argues for the “‘Liberated’ Woman in the Later Short Fiction,” a title that telegraphs its central claim and the teleological temporality that defines the figure of “Jean Rhys” that dominates the archive.⁵⁰

What interests me in particular is Fulton’s metafiction of *Rhys* as a “‘liberated’ woman,” which relegates the earlier representations as to the status of being unliberated (or “inferior” in multiple senses). This move is echoed throughout the critical conversations regarding Rhys, which privileges Rhys’ later fiction. The significance for my project as a whole is how this operation seeks to assign a narrative of development to the minoritarian subject as a general principle, a narrative that assigns the origins of subalternity as personal imprisonment, and the telos as collective liberation. In short, my entire thesis resists this minoritarian schema, which I argue is axiomatic in contemporary constructions of identity as political, reading “the political” in this narrow way: the delineation of minority identity as itself strictly a narrative of *bildung*—or, failing such liberation, or fulfillment thereof, a narrative of political inefficacy, failure, and impasse.⁵¹ Naipul, Alvarez, Mellown, and Fulton—not to mention more recent critics who champion Rhys’ postcolonial turn in the

later fiction, as seen above—seem to coalesce around a narrative of Rhys the author as becoming-postcolonial, becoming-political, and, more importantly for my purposes, becoming-minoritarian. For instance, note how Fulton includes the themes of gender oppression and what she terms “sexual determinism” as present strictly in the early novels, in contrast to the “liberation” represented in the later, more recognizably feminist fiction (the “‘Liberated’ Woman” 264).

Of course, this meta-narrative is not specific to expatriate modernist woman writers born in the West Indies. Late Rhys—*Wide Sargasso Sea* most emphatically, in its fiercely legible politics and poetics against the plantocracy of Caribbean and British heteropatriarchy—is recovered and valorized within the context of late-Sixties Anglo-American literary culture, inflected by second-wave feminism, and, on the one hand, and decolonization and postcolonial writing back to the empire, on the other. The early fiction, for this reason, seems at once too unspecific, unworldly—Naipul talks of the lack of a public, or missing sense of history, in the early novels, with only one date—most significantly, 1914—in the first four novels (*Voyage in the Dark* 166). Rhys has an avowed autobiographical inspiration: in a 1970s BBC interview she famously says that fictional writing is “Either Personal or Simply Wishful Thinking.”⁵² By generalizing, however, about the importance of literary authors’ using autobiography as a resource for the fiction, Rhys makes a claim that distances her from said fiction even while accounting for its real-life inspiration. In the same interview, Rhys allows for the similarity of her “heroines” while also hedging against such a totalizing reading.⁵³ By admitting the similarities but also accounting for distinctions among and between her protagonists, Rhys seems to be allowing

her fiction some room to breathe—to be singular expressions, not comparable, and, more importantly, Rhys seems to protect her literary writing from the danger of being dismissed as “mere” recapitulated autobiography. In one interview, then, given at the height of Rhys’ recuperated reputation, she seemingly allows for some daylight between the novels and her own life—insisting, as Ford did, on her intense “instinct for form” and, thus, her literary distinction rather than harp on the personal inspiration. Like most authors, Rhys sought to secure the relative aesthetic autonomy of her creations, rather than allow the critical reception to dismiss her as a woman writer with little invention of her own.

And yet, Rhys allows this critical reception to remain in place. She responds, “all my girls are a little bit alike,” contradicting her first answer (“*Sargasso Sea* is more an effort of my imagination perhaps”). It is this “perhaps” that connects the contradiction—contradiction in the literal sense of the word. Rhys seems to be allowing the interviewer—and, by extension, the entire critical apparatus that rescued her and her work from oblivion—what it wants, what it sees, in her writing: herself, and the other “girls,” as “alike,” all one continuous iteration. But Rhys also denies this totalizing reading by this “perhaps”—“perhaps” Antoinette is “more an effort of my imagination,” Rhys says, while self-deprecatingly claiming, “there may be people with vast imaginations, great people. But I am not one of them” (3). Rhys is a complicated figure not least because of the autobiographical and inter-novelistic correspondences that seem to flatten out her literary archive into a curiously anti-feminist unity, in a now-dated misogynistic sleight of hand. The “Miss Rhys” of the reviews and interviews is no longer; but her protagonists and her aesthetic meta-narrative as a totality remain within this discursive matrix of feminine unity

and, more importantly for my overall project, in a teleological frame of the minority subject. Rhys' minority protagonist is first, woman; then, postcolonial woman (in the figure of Antoinette). But, what does the self-evidence entail, of the aesthetic and political developmental meta-narrative of Rhys' fiction, as beginning with a non-racialized, unlocatable protagonist, adrift in modernist Europe, and "ending" with the specificities of postcolonial experience? And what does it mean to name that meta-narrative as aesthetically and politically superior, because a product of greater "imagination"?

Interlude II: Beyond Minoritarian Bildung

In my study as a whole, these are some of the questions that I raise, to question the prevailing developmental narrative of modern minoritarian subjectivity. This framing serves to position a narrative founded on female postcolonial subjectivity, as in Rhys' later fiction; in Christopher Isherwood's qualified resistance to gay liberation in *A Single Man* (1964); or, in another context, those exiled from the development of the New Negro aesthetic ideology in the Harlem Renaissance, in Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry*.⁵⁴ The latter novel imagines misfit-minority subjectivity in the figure of Emma Lou Morgan, one the narrative itself calls a "total misfit," because of her skin color, among the "blue-veined" black bourgeoisie. Christopher Nealon, in *Foundlings*, argues for a similar teleology for queer subjects in the twentieth century.⁵⁵ His book locates early-twentieth-century or modernist queer narratives—such as Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness*—as originating a minoritarian tradition in the absence of a robust queer audience. Nealon constructs a three-stage process for minority (in this case, queer) narrative representation:

he begins with the solitary queers of Hall's controversial novel, and ends with queer writing that has its own pre-existing audience. In the middle are figures such as Hart Crane, mid-century writers who originate within a shared sense of commonality but lack the articulated community of our contemporary identitarian moment of name-your-collective-identity Pride Parades.

My dissertation seeks to disrupt the narrative telos by looking at narratives and authors—such as Rhys and Thurman—whose lives and fictions contradict yet also corroborate this teleological framing of the process of becoming of a minoritarian subject. I choose the term “minoritarian” and not identitarian because, as we have briefly seen with Rhys, such authors occupy various intersections of identity, and fit uneasily within such matrices. Yet, their fictions—and their lives, as well as the critical reception, which is colored by both realms of experience—seem to belie the minoritarian bildungsroman of late modernity. This bildungsroman, briefly, as I have encapsulated within Rhys' archive, operates as a three-part story of singularity, which then finds community, and finally this community finds its path to visibility and equilibrium, if not assimilation, within a majoritarian framework. This framework exists at the level of cultural and aesthetic representation: both feminism and woman writers, and canonization of both as legitimate minoritized experiences that then become all-but-majoritarian. Becoming is overcome.

In what sense is this now established tripartite narrative of minoritarian overcoming missing something vital—a something that constitutes the central problematic of this chapter, and my dissertation as a whole? In the sense that, with a literary archive such as Rhys', such a bildungsroman a) apes majoritarian political values of affective optimism and

personal autonomy; b) reinforces evaluative aesthetic norms, such as formal sophistication and, as we have seen with Rhys, “imaginative” distancing of the aesthetic from the personal, and yoking of the political to the aesthetic, with the “merely” personal rendered abject or necessary to overcome; indeed, c) the minoritarian meta-narrative of overcoming hinges on cancelling out “earlier” stages—such as Rhys’ rootless, lost urban protagonists, enduring a temporally suspended, non-publically historical existence. From the vantage point of minoritarian bildung, such earlier stages—as in the refrain of Rhys’ “earlier novels”—are retroactively seen as mere back-formation. As we have seen with Rhys, her last novel, the principal cause of her canonization, is built upon a forgotten foundation. This foundation consists of the four early novels, literally forgotten—out of print—until they were reprinted after the success of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward* argues against this dominant, if minority-subject-based, mode of cultural forgetting in the context of queer subjects and the “losses of queer history.” Love’s book (among others) faults the compulsory optimism of today’s assimilating queers, for such optimism hides the “bad old days” of queer self-loathing. Nealon seems to deploy queer modernist texts such as the Hall’s in such a fashion, as a period relic of an unreconstructed solitary subjectivity formation, which indicates how far “we’ve come.” More importantly, Love argues, such optimism forgets the *continuing* “bad days” of today. In other words, and in the terms of this study, Rhys’ early heroines are not simply artifacts of an earlier unreconstructed past. There might be Marya Zellis as well as Antoinette Cosways in our postcolonial and (supposedly) post-feminist present.

This chapter and my study as a whole questions the teleological narrative that glosses over the losses of minoritarian history. And history for me includes fictional narratives and their reception, including our own contemporary attachments. As Love claims in the context of queer subjects, something about the “bad old days” is intensely affecting to this day: she cites the fact that *The Well of Loneliness* is still the most widely read lesbian novel in English—although, Love reminds us, in a shockingly simple insight, it is also “the novel most hated by lesbians themselves” (100). Regardless of how much its narrative of a seminal misfit queer subjectivity is no longer operative, in Jean-Luc Nancy’s sense of the term, Hall’s novel remains a present-day agent within such operative communities who, it is said, no longer retain any semblance to the self-loathing, solitary, and misfit subjects of yesterday.⁵⁶

In the case of Rhys, the early novels are valuable instances of how minority subjects are represented as misfits, in her case as vaguely racialized, sexually subordinated women “underdogs,” marginalized in their own stories as decadent fallen women and weak New Women. But, such misfit status is not simply an artifact of Rhys’ unrealized literary talents, nor a symptom of the general absence of a feminist sense of community in her era, nor a shameful effect of Rhys’ belated identification with her Caribbean Creole heritage. Yet, when *Wide Sargasso Sea* appeared, her earlier novels re-appeared. Many critics in the ’70s, including Naipul, speak of the narrative logic of minoritarian overcoming. But Naipul, as we have seen, also speaks of the precocious timeliness of Rhys’ early novels (“Rhys thirty to forty years ago identified many of the themes that engage us today”). In some sense, then, they are considered ahead of their time—and also hopelessly behind the times,

simultaneously. Within the minoritarian frame, Rhys' preoccupation with misfits who represent socially stigmatized "inferior being" seems antiquated, embracing their own oppression. Within a larger frame, however, one encompassing the losses of human history altogether, which in Rhys' case include the horrors of the two world wars and the realities of colonization and decolonization in the West Indies, these novels seem timely for their depiction of a "friendless and worthless but pitiful woman," as West claimed.

West adds that Rhys "proved herself to be enamoured of gloom to an incredible degree," claiming that Rhys' "preference for gloom is not artistic but personal." But this notion of the personal is limited, and in our present historical consciousness we can better appreciate Rhys' exemplary attachment to the misfit minority's experiences of "inferior being," of being doubly dispatched from subcultural collectivity while remaining in the margins of majority culture. Such negative early modernist images remind us of the price to be paid for narratives of development: integration into a collective identity and norms of majority culture, such as aggrandized agency, liberal autonomy, and self-possessed individualism. The cultural price might be losing the attachments to loss, including self-loss, itself. Some minorities do not enjoy this privilege, and remain mired in the cultural shadows of "inferior being" that Rhys depicts so consistently.

"Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose"

As sketched above, the history of Rhys' reception often turns on the question of how to interpret the persistent negativity, passivity, and self-divestiture, and even self-

immolation (literal, in the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*) that defines the *diegetic* fictions' anti-developmental, antiheroic plots and central characters.

The ending of Rhys' story "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose" (1978; original title "The Birthday")⁵⁷ represents this vibrancy and marginality, the persistence of a misfit-minority sensibility in Rhys' "minor" or "early" works, whose dogged focus on "inferior being" are uneasily domesticated under the sign of overcoming, collectivity, or uplift.⁵⁸ This ending, as Kenneth Ramchand claims, seems to belie the story's tragic ending of innocence lost. Phoebe, the adolescent protagonist, has to relinquish the "childish game of choosing a bridal trousseau and picking names [Marcus, Rose] for the babies to come," after she has been inappropriately touched by an older friend of the family.⁵⁹ Ramchand notes: "One can almost hear the author's voice encouraging us to recognize victory for Phoebe," since the narrative balances the tragedy of innocence lost with the "prospect" of a future life "more difficult and uncertain but ... far more exciting" (14).

The story's conclusion thus encapsulates the tonal and ideological ambivalence in the Rhys archive. The ending registers both loss' numbing affect and libidinal "excitement" at the "prospect" of Phoebe's facing future "difficulties and uncertainties," all stemming from this originary sexual exploitation, based on Phoebe's vulnerability. For Phoebe is just twelve years old when she encounters Captain Cardew, a retired distinguished English war hero newly arrived in Jamaica. The impersonal narrator focalizes Phoebe after Mr. Cardew's first predatory sexual advance: "in a ferment," Phoebe "said nothing" and "looked up at him as though at some aged but ageless god" (27).

It is the question of such ambivalent admiration—or what reads as such—that a critic invested in feminist and postcolonial politics would nervously pose. And it is this ambivalent tragedy and “masochistic” excitement that Rhys’ fiction registers, not often with the benefit of dramatic irony of in the child’s point of view, which demystifies the “god-like” power of Mr. Cardews for the adult reader. Indeed, Rhys’ pre–War novels are vulnerable to being read as performing a masochistic mystification of the English male, especially his paternalistic authority and abusive sexualization of the alienated protagonist, many of whom are positioned as Phoebe is, that is to say, as a creolized “British” but not “English.” These early novels seem to perversely and retrogressively authorize the sexualized and gendered exploitation of minoritized subjects. Rhys’ Continental novels likewise represent an adult libidinal intensity hinted at by Phoebe when facing the “prospect” of an adult world already defined as dominating and dispossessing her in a deeply gendered Caribbean plantocracy.

The normative distinction between English and British is as decisive in Rhys’ life as it is in her fiction. A memoir from Rhys’ unpublished “Black Exercise Book” (1930s), for instance, relates that growing up as a Creole in Dominica, Rhys suffered subtly racialized, postcolonial shame and stigma at the hands of non-Island-born English boys and girls, based on her position as not “English,” but rather “a colonial” of “inferior status.” The best these childish avatars of Englishness could do was call her “British,” or a subject of the Crown without enjoying any of its class and crypto-ethnic privileges: “If I said I was English they at once contradicted me—or implied a contradiction—no [you’re] a colonial—you’re not English—[an] inferior being[.] ... If on the other hand I’d say exasperated I’m

not English as a matter of fact I'm not a bit. I would rather be French or Spanish they'd get even more annoyed at that. I was [a] traitor. You're British—neither one thing nor the other. Heads you win tails I lose" ("Black Exercise Book," Sheet 39–Verso). And it is this conception of "inferior being" that travels throughout Rhys' works, situated in terms of imperial subjection or gender subversion, consistently marked by class disaffiliation (the fallen woman) and problematic racial cross-identification, as we see in her most autobiographical modernist novel, *Voyage in the Dark*.

Diving Into the Wreck: *Voyage in the Dark*

Voyage in the Dark originates Rhys' fictional representations of "inferior being," later refashioned in "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose." In that novel, we find the most striking example, for the purposes of my argument, of explicitly misfit minority sentiments and ambivalent feminist politics, equally. Briefly, *Voyage* is a novel narrated in the first person, set in London and intermittently, via retroversion, represents fragments of scenes from the protagonist's West Indian childhood and adolescence. The novel tells the story of Anna Morgan—as the reader might remember from Athill's brief synopsis of the novel, cited above—who, at the beginning of the narrative, is eighteen years old (15).⁶⁰ Anna seems lost in London, having been there for two years at the beginning of the fabula (14), performing as a chorus girl and having a brief affair with Walter Jeffries, who lives in a lavish home in central London and may or may not be married.⁶¹ Anna is a motherless child—her stepmother Hester Morgan lives far from her, more so in terms of her careful disregard of Anna's welfare than geographically.⁶² For Hester is the only relative Anna has

in England; the rest are back on the island (Uncle Bo, and Francine, her family's Black Jamaican servant, whom Anna idolized) or dead (her father and mother).⁶³

In Part I of the novel, there is a scene with Anna and her associate in the Revue, Maudie Beardon, a double image of modernity: the fallen woman and the New Woman. Maudie tries to mentor Anna across the dangerous waters of the English sex-gender system. For Anna, as a West Indian in England, as an orphan, and as a young woman, is economically, sexually, and socially vulnerable—in terms of bourgeois respectability—and lacks the protection of parents, income, maturity, marriage, or profession. While out shopping, Maudie and Anna are picked up by two men. Maudie says to Anna, “Two men are following us. I think they’re trying to get off with us” (11), implying a louche sexual potential to the random encounter; it is only later the reader realizes that Maudie is a street-wise “professional”—while Anna is (still) an amateur—in the oldest-profession vein. The two characters double one another. Maudie is a future version of the fallen woman that Anna will become, in the logic of the narrative development—or un-development, given Anna’s descent into prostitution a short while after her affair with Jeffries ends (92–94; Parts III and IV, 139–79 and 183–88).

In the misfit-minority terms of gender subversion, however, Maudie Beardon and Laurie Gaynor represent what Anna fails to become. For they are clear foils for Anna. And they are both interesting figures for cultural types like the failed woman and, more obliquely in their modern unsentimental take on women’s autonomy, the New Woman. Laurie, for instance, is the strong, modern New Woman to Anna’s weak, colonized version: she is as English as English, and the racialized colonial distinction between these two

figures and the main character is unmistakable. In a particular moment, while in a restaurant on a double date with Anna and Carl and Joe, the suitors they just picked up (Part II, Chapters 2 and 3). Carl asks Anna

“Don’t you ever talk at all?” ... “What do you think about *the lady* at the next table? She certainly doesn’t look as if she loves us.”

I said, “I think she’s terrifying,” and they all laughed.

But I was thinking that it was terrifying—the way they look at you. So that you know that they would see you burnt alive without even turning their heads away....

“Terrifying?” Laurie said. “She doesn’t terrify me. I’m not so easily terrified. *I’ve got good strong peasant blood in me.*” (119–20; emphasis added)

Laurie’s Englishness is of a piece with the “lady” who stares at the table; no wonder she is not afraid—and no wonder the colonial subjectivity in Anna recognizes the imperial gaze as a “terrifying” and violent force—one befitting the “hate” such a “lady” has while watching Anna’s kind “burnt alive ... without even blinking once” (120). The terms “lady” and “peasant blood” are signifiers for a very specific and bourgeois conception of proper English womanhood: Joe notes drily that this is “the first time [he’s] heard an English girl boast about having peasant blood” (Ibid). Usually, he adds, they “try to tell you they’re descended from William the Conqueror” (Ibid). The reference to the Conqueror completes the chain of associations with English “peasant blood” and imperial conquest, quite literally, displaying Laurie’s unassailable colonizer’s position, and Anna’s diametrically opposed and “terrified” disposition at such drunken, vainglorious, and overt racism that racializes her. Anna, being “from the island,” in the English characters’ nonspecific parlance, does not share this “peasant blood”; indeed, her stepmother suggests that Anna is of mixed ancestry, and says so as a way to wound her and distance herself from any emotional or material claims Anna might make on her.⁶⁴ Anna’s other friend and foil,

Maudie, is, unlike Anna, typically “modern” in her insouciant approach toward male suitors, manipulating the sex-gender system in order to marry into bourgeois domesticity (if not matrimony). She schools Anna relentlessly on how to milk Englishmen for their money, urging Anna to follow up with Jeffries (“You go out with him if he asks you” [16]) because men like him “have money; you can tell that in a minute, can’t you? Anybody can” (16). Maudie certainly can.

Later, once the highly contingent romantic attachment between Walter Jeffries and Anna Morgan progresses, Maudie’s wisdom in the business of being a kept woman—what else to call it?—functions as foreshadowing. For instance, Maudie warns Anna, after her first date with Walter: “ ‘Only, don’t get soppy about him,’ she said. ‘That’s fatal. The thing with men is to get everything you can out of them and not care a damn. You ask any girl in London—or any girl in the whole world if it comes to that—who really knows, and she’ll tell you the same thing’ ” (44). Moments later, after the conversation has drifted to other things, Maudie repeats her wise admonition, seemingly apropos of nothing: “ ‘You ought to make him give you a flat,’ she said.... ‘I bet he’s fond of you and he will. But don’t go and wait too long before you ask him, because that’s fatal too’ ” (47). The repetition of the word “fatal” is interesting for its connotation of the peril young women like Anna and Maudie risk in their relations with “rich men”—their precarious symbolic value as fleeting objects of desire (“don’t wait too long before you ask him”; Walter at one point coolly refers to Anna’s “predecessor” [51]), and their financial need to extract as much economic security from the relationship while they can, and maintain this advantage in a clear-eyed fashion (“don’t get soppy about him”).

In symbolic terms, both male and female in this sexual economy of exchange represent a high-risk, high-reward stock, one that must be sold within a given period of time, or its value will decrease rapidly. Maudie warns Anna to “swank as much as [she] could” from Jeffries, for “[t]he more you swank the better. If you don’t swank a bit nothing’s the use. If he’s a rich man and he’s keeping you, you ought to make him get you a nice flat up West somewhere and furnish it for you. *Then you’d have something*”—implying that securing some real estate is the only thing that will last from the affair, and all Anna should expect (45; emphasis added). Maudie’s wisdom regarding early-twentieth-century London’s class-sex-gender system (which she claims is a global system: “ask any girl ... in the whole world”) derives from her own missed opportunities doing with Vivian Roberts what she advises Anna to do with Walter Jeffries.

More importantly for the purposes of the novel as a whole, is the dark foreshadowing this segment provides. For Anna is not on the make as much as passively falling for the comforts and attention of Walter, and is thus not rapaciously attentive to the need to secure her “investments” by “swanking” as much durable property—real estate—from her beau before he drops her, as Vivian Roberts did with Maudie (“the cautious sort, is he? [Vivian] was awfully cautious too. It’s not such a good sign when they’re like that” [45]). Anna is hopelessly miscast in the role of fallen woman, and of the New Woman—as she is miscast as a chorus girl, and abandons that role as soon as she takes up with Jeffries. She does not know what “every other girl in the world” seems to know—the social-Darwinist rules of sexual selection and the risk—reward logic of cold opportunism governing the behavior and expectations of both parties. Anna is a romantic who somehow willingly,

although not consciously or deliberately—without guile, as it were—falls into the role of a “tart” and takes uneasily to the role of being “kept.”

In light of Anna Morgan’s situation at the beginning of the narrative, two topoi from the early part of the novel are of interest in particular, which display the misfit feelings and qualified feminism the novel offers its reader. The novel’s ambivalent gender politics and what I call *affective realism* are legible in Part I (7–100; by far the largest section of the novel), which brings Anna Morgan and Walter Jeffries into each other’s embrace.⁶⁵ Already, Anna’s first-person limited narration equivocates as to her status as a virgin—her mates in the revue tease her about this, but she never gives this fact away, always denying it, including to Jeffries (36–37).

In this section, I elaborate on the misfit minority characterization of Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* by looking at 1) the narrative’s seemingly trivial gendered concern with class status in the form of clothing and shopping, which intrudes intermittently in this novel, and in all of Rhys’ novels for that matter; and 2) the central romantic plot, which takes up all of Part I. The sexual subordination inherent in the failed romantic plot of Anna and Walter⁶⁶ is one topos of the misfit’s sense of “inferior being” represented in the text. And so, another related topos of this affective domain of the novel—its principal concern throughout, one definition of its feminist poetics, regardless of its severely qualified feminist politics—is clothes and shopping and, more extensively, socioeconomic class. I take up the gendered concern with clothing and shopping and how this relates to an imperial British class-gender system that the main female characters struggle to evade or overcome.

In Part I, after Anna becomes Walter's paramour and loses her virginity (Chapter 3), she and Maudie compare notes regarding Anna's recent rise in station ("I always knew you'd get off with somebody with money," Maudie says [44]). Anna has left the revue, now not needing to work (and in some ways, having accomplished the ostensible motive for being a Chorus Girl in the first place, as Maudie suggests). She and Maudie get together and, after warning Anna not to "get soppy about him"—and secure whatever durable capital she can from Walter, while she still can—Maudie has this interesting anecdote to relate to Anna, about her own experience with "cautious" and "rich" men.

"My dear, I had to laugh," [Maudie] said. "D'you know what a man said to me the other day? It's funny, he said, have you ever thought that a girl's clothes cost more than the girl inside them?"

"What a swine of a man!" I said.

"Yes, that's what I told him," Maudie said. "'That isn't the way to talk,' I said. And he said, 'Well, it's true, isn't it? You can get a very nice girl for five pounds, a very nice girl indeed; you can even get a very nice girl for nothing if you know how to go about it. But you can't get a very nice costume for her for five pounds. To say nothing of underclothes, shoes, etcetera and so on.' And then I had to laugh, because after all it's true, isn't it? People are much cheaper than things. And look here! Some dogs are more expensive than people, aren't they?' " (45–46)

This cynical anecdote invokes Herbert Spencer's notion of social Darwinism, which, in a sexual context, governs the relations between "kept women" and "rich men," in a way that exposes its cruel economic logic. "Nice girls" become commodities, and "girl's clothes" become reified as holding the value the "nice girls" supposedly possess. Instead, it is the clothes that make the "girl"—in the mimed misogynist discourse of the novel—and it is Maudie's own logic that her male friend throws in her face. That is why Maudie laughs. What is interesting is that Maudie's cautioning Anna earlier, about securing her future with the rich lover, in the form of making him purchase her a furnished flat,

returns in its most twisted form, from the opposite direction. Now, it is the male who expounds on the economic logic of risk and exchange value in sexual relations and gendered objects, and the fungibility among gendered objects—such as clothes, or a nice fur coat—and their user. If a “nice girl” is reduced to her pure exchange value on the sexual marketplace, and if she (unlike Maudie) is not wise, she will be “had” for much less than a furnished flat—she will be had for five pounds, or even “for nothing if you know how to go about it.” The emphasis, as with Maudie’s other anecdotes, is on “knowing”—what one is worth, what the man is worth, and not to get “soppy about it” but to extract as much value from both, before time runs out: in terms of the “nice girl,” her age, her looks, and thus her resources for securing that flat and that fur coat that will make her financially independent from men (“Then you’ll have something”). And in terms of the “rich man,” regarding his interest in the “nice girl,” which Maudie warns is limited and fraught with risks (“that’s fatal”), and can leave the “girl” owning nothing and being reduced to “nothing” in the exchange.

Rhys’ early novels can be summed up as tracking this oppressive logic of economic exchange in a loveless and barren sexual marketplace, with others in the series—notably *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight*—presenting the after-effects of years of “exchanges” on the psyches and moral subjectivity of their aging, and, thus, increasingly less valuable in the market of exchange, female protagonists. The latter book in fact is famous for its clear-eyed—and cutthroat—depiction of a proto-feminist war between the sexes, where it is the older woman (Sasha Jansen) who (hypocritically) turns the tables and plays the “rich man” role, with a male gigolo on the make. Sasha realizes the

young man's stratagem—having played that role before—and decides to get her revenge. But it is she who gets her come-uppance, in the form of sexual violence and rape—demonstrating, again, Rhys' certain feminist concerns regarding women's social disadvantage in a man's world. Though no “doormat,” Sasha Jansen is still trampled “by a world of boots”—even when she coldly sought to get her revenge on said world given the benefit of many years fighting the battle of the sexes, the battle between “kept women” and “rich men.” Despite turning the tables, Jansen still winds up on the ground, as does Marya Zelli (quite literally on the ground, knocked unconscious) at the end of *Quartet*.

Anna's tragedy in *Voyage in the Dark* resides in her many dispossessions—from her father's inheritance, taken by her stepmother; from her West Indian place of birth, with a traveling troupe in southern England; from a hopeless love affair, after being abandoned by Jeffries; and from any economic independence aside from her resorting to commodifying her bodily resources after her romantic aspirations run dry. But another tragedy is the simple one of not knowing how to play the game. Anna, indeed, “gets soppy” about Walter, and, in the next example, demonstrates how her misfit minority role resides, on the one hand, in her resistance to obeying the cold sexual—economic logic of exchange with him, and, on the other, in her attachment to him come what may. In other words, Anna's misfit status explains why she does everything wrong, expecting and producing love where only market logic should be—and is, on Walter's side—and defending her growing attachment to an economically dependent role. As we have seen, a “nice girl” that can be “had” for five pounds is worth less than a “rich man” who can guarantee her future in the form of a furnished flat in London, if she knows how to secure such a (possible) future—

despite the “rich man’s” own economic incentive to prevent that very future from happening. And so the logic and wheel goes, Anna vaguely aware of that, thanks to Maudie and others of her kind, but also just as vaguely aware of other needs—the security of physical and paternalistic contact and protection—that Walter Jeffries provides, but that he also takes away.

Anna’s resistance to and desire for Walter—her self-defeating libidinal and affective ambivalence, typical of a misfit-minority subjectivity—is evident from their first date, which occurs rapidly in the novel, in the second chapter (19–34).⁶⁷ Chapter Two opens with an awkward dinner at a fancy hotel and restaurant (19–20). Anna thinks Walter “looked at me as if he were trying to size me up” (20, an echo of her thoughts about him and his friend a week earlier during their first meeting).⁶⁸ After dinner, and much wine, Walter tries to kiss Anna:

My arms hung straight down by my sides awkwardly. He kissed me again, and his mouth was hard ... and I hated him.

“Look here, let me go,” I said. He said something I didn’t hear. “Do you think I was born yesterday, or what?” I said, talking very loud. I pushed him away as hard as I could. I could feel the sharp points of his collar against my hand. I kept saying, “Damn you, let me go, damn you. Or I’ll make a hell of a row.” *But as soon as he let me go I stopped hating him.* (22–23; emphasis added)

Anna’s ambivalence is legible in the last sentence; her “hatred” toward Walter dissipates “as soon as he lets her go.” Yet, the fact is that Walter does not let her go—at least, not when she asks him to. Walter refuses to let her go until Anna threatens to make a scene (“make a hell of a row”); she must push him away to make him stop his advances. Note, too, the violence of his nice clothes—the “sharp points” of Walter’s collar pinch against Anna’s hand. Such a seemingly trivial detail represents the motif of the connection

between human clothing and its wearer, touched upon earlier. If a “girl’s clothes” are more expensive than the “girl” wearing them, Walter’s clothes are, by the same token, more violent than he is, as it is his “sharp” collar that “pinches” her. His mouth may murmur sweet nothings in her ear, but his collar physically speaks to his power in this moment. The romantic and violent are intertwined, and the agent of violence is inanimate, as the subject of romance (or sexual desire) is insensitive, perhaps insensible, to the violence of its sartorial armor. Of course, it is not just Walter’s collar that is “hard”: “his mouth was hard ... and I hated him.” There is a beyond-the-obvious metonymic connection here, between Walter’s mouth and his collar—one is hard, the other sharp—that mirrors that between the clothes and its wearer, the girl’s value and the value of her clothing. Somehow the two aspects of human presentation are placed at the same level by Rhys’ prose. There is no metaphysical distinction between orders of representation: clothing and human being in both instances are linked and in some ways fungible in terms of economic value, or in terms of agency: Walter’s collar is more violent than his words or his actions themselves, and just as identifiable with his own intention as the cost of his suit with his own expensive lifestyle. Walter’s potency derives from the same resource—superior economic status—and is reified in his own sartorial potency, in an almost comically literal Marxian sense.

Anna’s affective and libidinal ambivalence toward him—“as soon as he let me go I stopped hating him”—defines the early part of the relationship, and lasts until their first sexual experience, which is to say, not long at all. Indeed, Anna’s ambivalence toward Walter mirrors her ambivalence toward living in England, and her life as a twilight personage—neither truly a “tart” nor a “virgin,” but also a little bit of both, in the hetero-

patriarchal language of the novel. Her irreducibility as neither one thing nor another—neither virgin nor “tart,” British but not English, middle-class yet penniless—is part of her misfit characterization. Not as nice as Maudie, Laurie tells Anna in no uncertain terms: “I think you’re a bit of a fool.... And I think you’ll never get on, because you don’t know how to take people.... [And] you always look half-asleep and people don’t like that” (129). This devastating speech occurs after Jeffries leaves Anna and she falls ill with the flu, staying in bed for two weeks and admitting in interior monologue that she “feel[s] like a ghost” (114). Anna’s “ghost-like” demeanor speaks to her passivity, her “looking half-asleep,” and her inability to “take people,” by which Laurie means Anna’s inability to leverage her feminine assets to literally “take” those of wealthy Englishmen. Anna is far too besotted by her own misfit status, mixed emotions, and social naiveté to be the type of person who “gets on” and “takes people” as a hardened individual would—one such as Laurie, or Walter, or, for that matter, any other character in the novel.

The sexual encounter between Walter and Anna illuminates her ambivalence toward him and the power—and allure—he wields for her (“she looked up at him as though at some aged but ageless god”?). A week after taking care of her during her bout with influenza (1.2), Walter brings Anna to his house on Green Street. In this, the third scene of the novel, Anna has her first sexual experience. The encounter itself is elided, and is preceded by a significant argument between the two, about whether Anna’s being a “virgin” really “matters” (36):

[H]e started talking about my being a virgin and it all went—the feeling of being on fire—and I was cold.

“Why did you start about that?” I said. “What’s it matter? Besides, I’m not a virgin if that’s what’s worrying you.”

“You oughtn’t to tell lies about that.”

“I’m not telling lies, but it doesn’t matter, anyway,” I said. “People have made all that up.”

“Oh yes, it matters. It’s the only thing that matters.”

“It’s not the only thing that matters,” I said. “All that’s made up.”

He stared at me and then he laughed. “You’re quite right,” he said.

But I felt cold, as if someone had thrown cold water over me. When he kissed me I began to cry. (36)

Walter tells Anna her being a virgin is “the only thing that matters,” meaning it guarantees her sexual purity—and establishes her paradoxical symbolic value, to Jeffries’ hetero-patriarchal mindset, as a young woman who can be bought, but is also, importantly, not a professional, thereby retaining the allure of being nominally “respectable.” Yet what is most interesting about this preamble is Anna’s continued ambivalence toward Walter. The moment before he had “put his hand on my knee and I thought, ‘Yes ... yes ... yes ...,’” and a moment later “it all went—the feeling of being on fire—and I was cold.” (The mention of “fire” and “cold” as opposite sensations, which register Anna’s ambivalent affects and erotic interest, are perhaps too obvious to mention.) Characteristically, Anna’s affective and libidinal ambivalence manifests itself again in this scene: “He wiped my eyes very gently with his handkerchief, but I kept saying, ‘I must go, I must go.’ Then we were going up another flight of stairs and I walked softly” (37). Anna’s recalcitrance and self-contradiction is evident in this movement—walking softly, up the stairs to the bedroom—while she “kept saying ‘I must go, I must go,’ ” indicating her lassitude, relative lack of autonomy, and ambivalent desire for what is to come.

The scene culminates in interesting narratorial flourishes, speaking to Anna’s characteristic ambivalence, both radically needy and desirous and also recalcitrant and resistant. Formally, Rhys carefully represents the affective and libidinal ambivalence, and

Anna's divided consciousness, as both precursors and registers of the "wanted"/"hated" sexual contact. After the sentence quoted above ("Then we were going up another flight of stairs and I walked softly"), another segment of interior monologue arises in italics, deploying cues of self-reflexive psycho-narration rather than those of psychological consciousness. Which is to say, instead of Rhys' normal narrative technique, which depicts Anna's first-person interior monologue, this sequence depicts Anna's psycho-narration *as if she were narrating it, in writing*, about herself in the third person:

Then we were going up another flight of stairs and I walked softly. *"Crawling up the stairs at three o'clock in the morning," she said. Well, I'm crawling up the stairs.*

I stopped. I wanted to say, "No, I've changed my mind." But he laughed and squeezed my hand and said, "What's the matter? Come on, be brave," and I didn't say anything, but I felt cold and as if I were dreaming.

When I got into bed there was warmth coming from him and I got close to him. *Of course you've always known, always remembered, and then you forget so utterly, except that you've always known it. Always—how long is always?*

(37; emphasis in original)

The chapter breaks after this segment, implying an ellipsis of the sexual act. The intrusion of (presumably) Anna's narratorial voice in the third person is a shock to the reader, as it signifies her alienation from her own embodied actions and Walter's. Her ambivalence serves for naught; she still goes up the stairs. And so part of her consciousness registers this "flight" by a narratorial turn toward self-displacement—third-person narration of a displaced first-person point of view: the landlady had called her out for "crawling up the stairs," and Anna here ventriloquizes this same phrasing with an added note of defiance: "*Crawling up the stairs at three o'clock in the morning, 'she said. Well, I'm crawling up the stairs.*" The shift from first- to third-person, and immediately back to first-person, illustrates, first, Anna's diegetic loss of control ("I stopped. I wanted to say, 'No,

I've changed my mind.' But he laughed ..."). Second, the loss of control in the first-person is registered as an assumption of control at a higher level of narration. The narrator—who ostensibly is focalized through Anna's point of view—assumes a third-person perspective of dissociation over her own person (not simply echoing the landlady's terms for her, but also noting the dispassionate way Anna presents herself: "I felt cold and as if I was dreaming"). The use of italics and the distanced, semi-ironic "she said" present an arch tone that implies, simultaneously, Anna's self-division, paradoxical self-reflexivity and self-distancing, and, finally, paradoxically defiant self-deprecation ("crawling up the stairs," echoing the landlady's phrasing, doubles the servile connotation of "to crawl" but speaks back to such a characterization; Anna "owns" it, in our terms).

The shift from "Crawling up the stairs ... she said" to "Well, I'm crawling up the stairs" is a shift in perspective and in autonomy. From Anna's relative loss of autonomy in the scene—registered in the ambivalent movement of stopping and continuing—we end with a resourceful narratorial strategy of owning the ambivalence and the loss of autonomy. Paradoxically, Anna's upward passage in diegetic space mirrors the ascension in levels of narration, and a belated shoring up of (narratorial, if not diegetic) autonomy *by* regarding the loss of autonomy as if "writing about" it ("she said"). The autonomy resumes, haltingly and sardonically at first, in the displaced, unnatural and (literally) unfamiliar voice of *Anna as her own third-person narrator*. Then, Anna's familiar voice returns to its proper (first) person. The "ghost-like" Anna becomes a real ghost to herself, as she splits into narrator and narratee after the brief yet significant loss of autonomy and displacement of self (initiated by Walter's not taking no for an answer). This formal movement is registered,

first, via italics; second, via a weirdly self-conscious, self-dispossessed, third-person narration; and third, via a lyrical, enigmatic meditation that closes the scene, presented in *second-person* italicized narration: “*Of course you’ve always known, always remembered, and then you forget so utterly, except that you’ve always known it. Always—how long is always?*”

This reads as a shift into yet another (intermediary, or mediating) level of narration, a free-indirect discourse between two voices. Perhaps the third- and first-person “Annas” meld here into the second-person “You” who has “always known it.” *What* has always been known, and *who* has “always known it,” is, ironically, *unknown*.

The content of the passage is the ambivalent proceeding of desire to its consummation in sexual intercourse—for the first time for Anna—and the attendant loss of autonomy regarding this very act, which is itself a form of self-loss, in a way that is wholly unfamiliar to Anna and importantly leads to a moment of imagined writing (the famous “she said,” a hallmark of narrative discourse). In this “mis-fit” between Anna’s ambivalent desire for Walter’s “warmth” and recoil from his “cold” bed, Rhys’ text registers a flicker of Anna as a narrative persona in the third person, recuperating self-loss at a higher level of (self-) consciousness, ending with a lyrical voice that Walter cannot hear nor respond to; nor one that the reader can easily comprehend, nor answer to (“How long is always?”). Importantly, it was she said—not he said. Anna finds her voice by losing it (“I wanted to say, ‘No, I’ve changed my mind.’ But ... I didn’t say anything”).

And yet, the final lyrical moment in the text speaks to more than Anna’s paradoxical self-loss and self-mastery. The turn to second-person narration could also signify the author’s intrusion, or an impersonal narrator’s intrusion that is not synonymous

with Anna or “Rhys” herself. Given the biographical understandings of Rhys’ entire narrative oeuvre—as we have seen—such narratorial excrescences invite an extra-textual interpretation regarding Rhys’ own use of writing to process the vicissitudes of her own life, parts of which mirror and are co-opted by the proceedings in *Voyage in the Dark*. The novel is itself a voyage in the dark, registered narratorially by the flight into a formal technique I call intensive *objective italicized thought*, coinciding with shifts to other levels of narration in affectively resonant moments—fragments of memories of Anna’s West Indian childhood and adolescence, moments of sadness or crisis, but also of transient happiness or “giddiness,” as we see below. As the previous passage demonstrates, these moments are also often linked to sexual desire and desire in all its forms. *Voyage in the Dark* is a novel that breaks its frame, in the sense used by Brent Edwards, as it chronicles the rupture of perspectival continuity and cultural memory in a diasporic feminist consciousness.⁶⁹

After this dissolution of Anna’s subjectivity into that of a pseudo-impersonal third-person narrator, and this one in turn into a second-person perspective (which seems to intersect with Anna’s first-person point of view), the scene that follows is telling for its highly *un-ambivalent* depiction of Anna’s self-abasement in Walter’s eyes. This moment occurs directly after the text’s hiatus from first-person narration, a grammatical and rhetorical flight into higher and more impersonal narrative levels. As we have seen, this line of flight—to use a distinctive Deleuzian term for what Deleuze also calls de-territorialization—allows the subjective center of consciousness to be displaced. What displaces Anna Morgan’s “I” is an impersonal point of view: first, a grammatical switch to the third-person and from normal narrative discourse into italicized direct discourse. This

distancing device is not attached to the subjective first-person; it is, one might say, an objective first-person, or a depersonalized interior monologue, a dribble of stream-of-consciousness.

Voyage does not often employ this effect. Interestingly, Anna's reminiscences of her early life in the West Indies are not necessarily detached from the narrative in this manner, indicating the narratorial flight into objective intensive italics obeys a different principle, one distinct from designation of retroversion or discontinuous temporality. Indeed, the first moment of intensive objective italics occurs during the first date, when Jeffries first kisses Anna. Thus, similarly to the episode just recounted, though much more brief, the first flight appears in a moment of sexual intimacy:

He said, "You've got the loveliest teeth...." And then he started kissing me and all the time he was kissing me I was thinking about the man at that supper-party ... when he told me, "You don't know how to kiss. I'll show you how to kiss. This is what you do."

I felt giddy. I twisted my head away and got up.

There was a door behind the sofa, but I hadn't noticed it before because a curtain hung over it. I turned the handle. "Oh," I said, "it's a bedroom." My voice went high.

"So it is," he said. He laughed. I laughed too, because I felt that that was what I ought to do. *You can now and you can see what it's like, and why not?*

(22; original emphasis)

The second-person italicized segment seems to entail Anna's impersonal moment of flight into intensive objectified thought that, as before, attends intersubjective contact of the erotic kind. In addition, the narrative describes Anna's cognitive and affective state as "giddy," which, in the parlance of the novel, is the label for Anna's state of consciousness in key moments of heightened dramatic content—usually, an erotically traumatic encounter, a flashback of said encounter, or a febrile state of delirium. The last case refers to Anna's

illness during early pregnancy, the narrative segment that constitutes the last part of the novel. As she is miscarrying and requires urgent medical assistance, Anna collapses into a delirious state of consciousness near the end of the narrative: “ ‘I’m a bit giddy,’ I said. ‘I’m awfully giddy...’ ” (184). On the next page: “ ‘I’m giddy,’ I said. ‘I’m awfully giddy.’ ” (185). In this moment of feverish delirium, not coincidentally, the narrative flashes back to a moment of traumatic contact. Lying in bed, Anna narrates: “I shut my eyes” (184). She then feels as though “the bed mounted into the air with me”:

I had to clutch the sheets to prevent myself from falling out. And the clock was ticking loud, like that time when I lay looking at the dog in the picture ... and watching his chest going in and out and I kept saying, “Stop, stop,” but softly so that Ethel wouldn’t hear. “I’m too old for this sort of thing,” he said; “it’s bad for the heart.” He laughed and it sounded funny.... I said, “Stop, please stop.” “I knew you’d say that,” he said. His face was white. (184)⁷⁰

In this section of the novel, we see the recurrence of a scene of unwelcome, if not forced, sexual contact (“Stop, stop”), the state of “giddiness” that precedes it, and the male character’s laughter. Compare this with an earlier moment, with Walter Jeffries. In that scene too, quoted above, Anna feels giddy, has a flashback to a traumatizing erotic encounter (“ ‘You’ve got the loveliest teeth ... I’ll show you how to kiss’ ” [22]). Lastly and importantly, in both scenes Anna faces a male laughing at—or with—Anna and desiring her: “ ‘So it is,’ he said. He laughed. I laughed too, because I felt that that was what I ought to do” (22); “ ‘I’m too old for this sort of thing,’ he said; ‘it’s bad for the heart.’ He laughed and it sounded funny” (184). As we have seen, the novel experiments with inventing a narrative code of italicized objective thought that registers at times traumatic sexual events overlaid with memories of similar situations (“*You can now and you can see what it’s like, and why not?*”) while at other times it registers Anna’s reactions to these

events at the second- or third-person level, indicating Anna's conscience, a *double (sub-) consciousness*, regarding said situations impersonally, sometimes coldly, sometimes ironically.⁷¹

Anna's racial identification as "white," not "coloured," in the code of the early-century Caribbean racial caste system to which she belongs, but also wanting to be Black, is also indicative of her misfit-minority status. For Anna reminisces about her childhood friend, Francine, who as one of the Morgan family's servants, and as a Black West Indian, was in important ways separate from her—in terms of class status, language (patois) and other forms of island culture, and ethnic identity. Anna relates a memory of Francine "washing up" in the family's kitchen, her eyes watering from the smoke: "She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and looked sideways at me. Then she said something in patois and went on washing up. But I knew of course she disliked me too because I was white; and that I would never be able to explain to her that I hated being white" (72). Anna does not, however, simply "hate being white," denoting her dis-identification from her family's colonial caste identity. Anna also "wanted to be black, I always wanted to be black" (31). Anna remembers being ill for a long time, lying in bed, and she "was happy because Francine was there, and I watched her hand waving the fan backwards and forwards and the beads of sweat that rolled from underneath her handkerchief. Being black is warm and gay; being white is cold and sad" (31). This racialized value system is easily criticized as displaying the ignorance of white privilege, and has been, as the critical history of Rhysian reception suggests.⁷² Yet, it is also true that the novel equates "whiteness" with "coldness," and Englishness with this same symbolic value system. And, as a misfit

subject, neither truly English nor truly West Indian—at least, not the West Indian heritage that she idolizes from a young age, as we see in these brief examples—Anna is interstitial as a postcolonial subject to British mastery, both in imperialist, racialized, and gendered terms. Jeffries calls her a “rum little devil,” always emphasizing her racialized colonial subjectivity, aligning her with the very “heat” that Anna prizes in Francine; this same heat is a sign of individual labor, and the colonial plantocracy’s institutionalized racism and class oppression. Jeffries’ very rich, proper English home on Green Street in London “was not friendly to me,” Anna agrees, and the novel is replete with the violent judgment of Englishness toward Anna and her kind. Anna’s affair with Walter turns on this distinction between them—her island heat, and his English coolness. Walter tells her: “I’m sure it’s beautiful ... but I don’t like hot places much. The tropics would be altogether too lush for me, I think” (54). Anna tries to convey the beauty of this lost land that yet exists in her imagination, as a deracinated subject who never really was part of the land when she lived there, and, unsympathetically, as the daughter of former slave owners. Nevertheless, Anna tells him with pride, “I’m a real West Indian,” to which Walter replies, dismissively, “I know, my sweet ... you told me that before.” “‘I don’t care,’ I said. ‘It was a lovely place’” (55). Anna’s connection to the plantocracy and her family’s slave-owning history is disjoint with her desire for and identification with West Indian Black culture. Such desire leads her to childishly identify⁷³ with the name of a slave listed on one of her family’s manifests: “Maillotte Boyd, aged 18, mulatto, house servant” (52–53). This reference returns at an odd moment of sexual intimacy between Anna and Walter:

Lying down with your arms by your sides and your eyes shut.
 “Walter, will you put the light out? I don’t like it in my eyes.”

Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. . . . But I like it like this. I don't want it any other way but this.

"Are you asleep?"

"No, I'm not asleep."

"You were lying so still," he said.

Lying so still afterwards. That's what they call the Little Death.

(56; original emphasis)

At this moment, the return to an impersonal narrative discourse—interior monologue in the second person—aligns with Anna's erotic maturation. This receding naiveté is indicated by the concurrence with proverbial wisdom: "*That's what they call the Little Death.*" Anna's psycho-narration thus indicates her maturity and self-alienation at the same time. The use of objective italics underscores this movement of deeper consciousness that is at the same time self-ironizing and impersonal, as if a battle is going on within: "But I like it like this. I don't want it any other way but this." This utterance of assent to "this" remains undefined, until "it" becomes "that," which is called "the Little Death." But the memorial contact with the slave-list belies this "But I like it like this"—Anna's psycho-narration seems to be assimilating erotic ambivalence toward perhaps undesired sexual contact as continuous with her slightly repellent imaginary identification with Maillotte Boyd. She seems to retreat into a defensive state of paralysis ("Lying so still afterwards"), which is typical of her vegetative gestural repertoire throughout the novel (all those bouts of influenza!).

This moment also shows Rhys' problematic cultural code-switching between a discourse of sexual subordination and that of racial subordination: the figure of the enslaved Maillotte Boyd who serves as a mental correlate in Anna's mind to her own self-absence as an "inferior being."⁷⁴ The novel famously equates blackness with joy, and whiteness with

sadness. And it is this stereotypical perspective of the privileged child of Creole plantation owners that shows the political thorniness of the misfit minority position. Here, the minoritarian outlook is that of the privileged racial and cultural location Anna Morgan enjoyed back in the West Indies, as a refuge from the subordination she suffers as a sexual object in London. Racialized as a “rum devil” by Jeffries, Anna Morgan extends the discourse of race to subtly equate sexual subordination with the history of enslavement. Both however are tied to her family’s patriarchal legacy as a slaveowning caste, and her own sense of sexual imprisonment as an orphaned daughter of that class, and a racialized subject that is nowhere equivalent to the subjection of West Indians from the Black diaspora. That Rhys’ text makes this facile cultural equation speaks to the racist logic embedded in the consciousness of Anna Morgan, and, in many critics’ eyes, in that of Rhys herself. The misfit Creole minority here, in the figure of Anna Morgan, defensively displaces the burden of subalternity to a racial other—here, the Maillotte Boyd entry on the Morgans’ slave ledger—making any recuperation of the novel’s politics of “the underdog” or feeling like an “inferior being” problematic. This problematic political dimension of misfit minorities is a hallmark of this literary-cultural sensibility, which entails forms of double exile that seem based on preexisting social privilege. But how realistic to display the vagaries of double exile and what we now call intersectionality in a text set during World War I! The sense of affective realism, warts and all, including the noxious politics of intermingled exile and privilege, are a hallmark of the misfit minority sensibility.

Anna's sexual defense predicated on racial privilege returns in a moment that exemplifies the novel's misfit-minority grammar of feelings. This crucial moment epitomizes Anna's increasingly servile gestural and affective comportment toward Walter:

It was as if everything in my head had stopped.

He came into the room again and I watched him in the glass. My handbag was on the table. He took it up and put some money in it. Before he did it he looked towards me but he thought I couldn't see him. I got up. I meant to say, "What are you doing?" But when I went up to him, instead of saying, "Don't do that," I said. "All right, if you like—anything you like, any way you like." And I kissed his hand.

"Don't," he said. "It's I who ought to kiss your hand, not you mine."

I felt miserable suddenly and lost. "Why did I do that?" I thought. (38–39)

In a novel that wears its class-inflected feminism on its sleeve—as in the discussion about the "swine of a man" who argues that "girl's clothes cost more than the girl inside them" (45)—this scene is striking. Contrast this cringing gesture to Laurie's, Anna's friend and foil, who says, within earshot of her male companion, "My shoe's undone" (142). Anna reflects on what happens next: "When the man did it up his hands were trembling. ('I can always make people crazy about me') " (142).

Laurie's last laugh—"I can always make people crazy about me"—contrasts sharply with Anna's gesture of kissing Walter's hand. More importantly, he knows this too: " 'Don't.... It's I who ought to kiss your hand, not you mine.' " Anna at once reflects on the significance of her self-abasement, the overt gesture of submission and adoration toward this "god-like" figure. For, like the heat and island sun that for Anna represents part of who she is, deep down, the coldness and bright light of the English sun represents Walter Jeffries. After the "Lying still moment," Anna is in a taxi, "thinking about home and when I got into bed I lay awake, thinking about it. About how sad the sun can be,

especially in the afternoon, but in a different way from the sadness of cold places, quite different" (56). She continues:

That was when it was sad, when you lay awake at night and remembered things. That was when it was sad, when you stood by the bed and undressed, thinking, "When he kisses me, shivers run up my back. I am hopeless, resigned, utterly happy. Is that me? I am bad, not good any longer, bad. That has no meaning, absolutely none. Just words. But something about the darkness of the streets has a meaning."
(57; emphasis added)

This moment closes Chapter 5, and is notable for its aligning of "laying awake at night"—which we have seen occurs even when Anna and Walter are together in bed—and of "thinking about home" (57, 56). The two places, memory banks, one could say, remain in some profound and ineffable way connected. Just as the refrain of the "house servant" *Maillotte Boyd, aged 18*, is connected with Anna's gesture of kissing Walter's hand. But how? She herself does not know: "I felt miserable suddenly and lost. 'Why did I do that?' I thought" (39). Why Anna feels "miserable and lost" after kissing Walter's hand is perhaps an easier question: Because he rejects her servile overture, a quite expressive gesture of besotted adoration or slave morality. In other criticism, such expressive performances of servility serve to undermine the very gesture through its parodic function (one thinks immediately of Homi Bhabha's work on mimicry, and Butler's conception of gender subversion, of an exaggerated performance of femininity).⁷⁵ Yet, Walter's mild rejoinder serves to severely qualify Anna's self-articulation, whether performed in an unselfconsciously ironic mode of mimicry or in self-abasing sincerity. If there be power in the "masochistic" gesture displayed by Anna in this moment, this power is seemingly neutralized by Walter's response, which reminds Anna of the gestures that "ought to" be used in the context of their relationship.

It is ironic that Walter corrects Anna quite mildly for exposing her gratitude for his emotional, erotic, and financial protection. The irony inheres in the fact that it is Anna who wants—or perhaps needs—such kinds of protection; knowing her deracination from family, culture, and past, her orphaned existence as a “ghost” in London, it makes emotional sense that she would literally cling to Jeffries as her benefactor (which is what the gestural idiom of kissing someone’s hand might imply). Another meaning for this gesture, of course, renders it parodic: Anna here plays the chivalrous role of the gentleman kissing his virginal lady’s hand in an inverted medieval romance. Perhaps it is in this sense, too, that Walter gently forbids Anna from showering him with such gestures of self-abasing affection. He is nothing if not a stickler for protocol, and in his mind, the protocol of their relationship is to insistently deny the material basis for its inequality: he makes sure Anna is not watching when he stuffs her purse with (British) money. The decorum is what Anna shatters—in one sense, by assuming an improper gender role, that of an overly solicitous (or feminized?) masculine suitor, thus lowering Walter into an unseemly ladylike role. Or, Anna’s servile gesture shatters the more political aspect of their interpersonal decorum, of actual dependence and need for being dominated, in a sexually paternalistic scene of affective, financial, even logistical protection (“Now, wait a bit. I’ll come with you to get a taxi” [38]).

Like other Rhys protagonists—or “the” Rhys protagonist—Anna Morgan attaches to a paternalistic figure that dominates her firmly but softly, and at this moment she lends expression to the basic truth of their situation. Unlike Laurie, who displays the full force of her leveraged exploitation of the racialized British class-gender system—she has only to say her shoelace is untied for her male companion to literally lower himself to fix it for her—

Anna occupies the role of the exploited, naïvely, without any premeditation. Her development throughout the novel can be read as her inability to move into an adult, that is to say, coldly instrumental and mutually exploitative, relationship to herself as a woman for hire and to her male suitors as mere financial and material supports. Anna Morgan's mistake, that is to say—and Rhys' triumph—is to demonstrate, first, her failure to live up to the socially Darwinian world of the naturalist novel of prostitution (when the novel begins, Anna is in the middle of reading *Nana* [9]). Second, Anna's mistake, and Rhys' triumph, is to show a misfit minority's inner contours of “inferior being”: the internal moments of self-alienation, self-abasement, and, most importantly, the radical failure to let go of internalized oppressive socialization, negative feelings, habits of mind, and performative routines of exploited life energies. The ending of the novel, once the physician performs the abortion and Anna is no longer in danger of dying from miscarriage, is indicative of this fundamental distinction. The doctor says: “ ‘You girls are too naïve to live, aren't you?’ ” (187). Here Anna's “naïveté” is highlighted once more—Walter called her “my dear Infant” in his Dear John letter (93)—and Anna overhears it: “Laurie laughed. I listened to them both laughing and their voices going up and down. ‘She'll be all right,’ he said. ‘Ready to start all over again in no time, I've no doubt’ ” (187).

Conclusion: Two Hands: Weak Hand, Strong Hand

I have been more interested in the meta-discursive narrative of (aesthetic, literary, political) development drawn around Rhys, by the history of Rhysian reception, and beyond this, in the aesthetic impact of Rhys' texts: their inarguable capacity to continue to

“disturb readers” from either side of the aisle, as it were. Secondly, I have been interested in the derogation of psychological interpretations—be they archetypal-Jungian,⁷⁶ Freudian, Deleuzian, or even explicitly psychiatric, regarding Rhys’ early novels, which seem to disturb critics most, such that many turn to the *DSM* to make sense of their protagonists and their choices (or lack of choices, as the case may be).⁷⁷ At this point, the figure of Rhys looms over psychological readings of the work, a reading practice different from biographical interpretations of the Rhys heroine as proxy for the author herself. Athill guards against biographical interpretations despite, or maybe because, of Rhys’ avowed use of “her own experience” as material for the novels (vii). Athill champions the modernist doctrine of impersonality when she claims that Rhys always maintained aesthetic control over and detachment from this material. In contrast, I would like to question the reading protocol that aims to transcend the personal—Rhys’ life, as the material from which she drew for her fiction, as we see most clearly in the roman à clef—in order to recuperate it at the level of the political or the aesthetic. I have also tried to sidestep the controversy over Rhys and a too-strong analytic theory of the Rhysian aesthetic as “masochistic.”

A good discussion of the dangers of biographical readings of Rhys appears in Helen Nebeker’s Preface, where, seeking to debunk masculinist, bordering on misogynistic, psycho-biographical readings of Rhys, Nebeker writes: “Rhys’ critics reduce the female protagonists of her novels to a single character—a portrait of Rhys herself—who changes only in name and minor details” (ii). Nebeker adds that one such critic, “in order to prove his thesis that Rhys develops only one character, one psychological type in the body of her work ... avoids the publication sequence of the first four novels, arranging them, rather,

according to their internal chronology” (iii). (Athill, as we have seen, follows this “internal chronology” herself in the *Collected* and *Early Novels*—indicating that the “Rhys myth” is far more widespread and influential than previously understood, and exceeds political labels.) Nebeker further argues that the function of such criticism—her book was published in 1981—was to “attribute ostensible defects of style and characterization,” owing to the “failure to separate personal experience from aesthetic creation” (ii). It is ironic, however, that Athill herself—who knew Rhys fifteen years, and was thus her erstwhile interlocutor, and was presumably not misogynistic—makes a similar claim about the danger of the autobiographical “destroying” the aesthetic value of a literary text (the modernist argument, which values detachment and impersonality above all else). Athill writes that “the smallest touch of [the] autobiographical ... will destroy the reader’s confidence” (viii). Athill says Rhys would agree, because, as a consummate modernist, she was able to “stand back from ... experience far enough to see the whole of it and ... concentrate” on the rigorous aesthetic process of constructing a linguistic world. Athill then triumphantly claims, “Rhys could stand back, and her concentration on the process was as intense as that of a tight-rope walker. As a result her novels do not say ‘This is what happened to me,’ but rather ‘This is how things happen’ ” (viii).

That this author continues to trouble and disturb readers with the resonant passivity and arrested development of Anna Morgan, for example, says as much about each critical moment that reads Rhys’ novels, as it says about entrenched historical quandaries regarding women’s self-representation, the subaltern’s capacity to speak on her own behalf, and the political indeterminacy of misfit-minority literary texts. Indeed, these are critical

quandaries regarding the debatable significance of politics, history, biography, and psychology on the analysis of literary representation altogether.

Rhys' penchant for delving into risky terrain of representing such "inferior being" with a clinical eye and with resolute determination against uplift and autonomy in the early novels is incontrovertible, regardless of how we assign their politics as feminist texts or precisely the opposite. Interestingly, the misfit-minority sensibility of "inferior being" that characterizes the early novels is remarkable for its relative absence as a *central* feature in the short stories. This presence of the underdog reflects Rhys' aesthetic interest in literary form to represent the affective realism of misfit existence. Rhys' novels are, as Esty notes, anti-developmental, and more could be said about the assured oppositional stance toward development of any kind in Rhys' fictions. My interest, however, has also been to read the aesthetic pattern of the Rhys meta-fiction itself as a fiction of development, which severely qualifies—or is in productive tension with—the anti-developmental, anti-social "misfit" impulse of the early novels. As Dell'Amico argues for a different reason, namely to assign an underappreciated anti-colonialist impulse to the early novels, the short stories have always been richer and stranger than the novels, less deliberately focused on the anti-bildungsheld, those "pitiful" figures (according to West) who coalesce as the dark vision of the composite (anti-) heroine. Indeed, "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose" is notable for its moral and political continuity with the modernist novels—it returns to the early novels' preoccupation with misfit minority grammar of feelings. *Misfit minority* is, perhaps, a more ethical conception for the complex cultural sensibility depicted in Rhys' early fiction, whose status as feminist or postcolonial texts, as I have noted, is indeterminate. Richer and

stranger, perhaps, is the resigned refusal of every form of consolation, while the author's image transcends these crouching gestures: Rhys' misfit becoming mythic.

NOTES

¹ Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, “Without a Dog’s Chance,” review of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, by Jean Rhys. *The New York Review of Books* (18 May 1972), np, Jean Rhys Archive, University of Tulsa, OK (Series I. Box 5). Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text. Naipaul’s review comes upon the re-issuing of Rhys’s second published novel, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931). The latter, like Rhys’s modernist novels had been out of print until the triumph of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Publication details below.

² Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (New York: Norton, 1994), 130, 98. Further citations are to this reissued paperback edition, and embedded parenthetically in the text.

³ Quoted from facsimile MS of Rhys’ “The Black Exercise Book.” Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 1. Folders 1 and 1A, 59 sheets (118 pages, np), Sheet 39—Verso, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, OK. All transcriptions from Rhys’ manuscript Black Exercise Book mine, as is ersatz pagination. Further citations embedded in the text.

⁴ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: On the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963).

⁵ Ford Madox Ford, “Preface: Rive Gauche,” *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (London: Cape, 1927), 7–27, 24. Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text.

⁶ For more on the notion of the “event” of writing with regard to the structure of feeling he identifies as postcolonial shame, see Timothy Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁷ Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Further page references embedded parenthetically in the text.

⁸ I use the term “structure of feeling” to evoke Raymond Williams’s concept of an ineffable set of affects that approximate cognitive capture, but are still so inchoate as to defy analysis as precise “structures.” But the structure encompasses a given social collectivity—as Heather Love notes, for Williams, the “generation” was a salient such collectivity subject to a common structure of feeling. (Heather K. Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007], 12. Further references embedded parenthetically in the text.) The term has engendered multiple and conflicting definitions from critics who assume its unitary signification. But the precise issue with the concept of “structure of feeling” is that the concept itself is nebulous and thus resides somewhere otherwise, that it resists and escapes any attempt to materialize it as a legible edifice of material or cognitive or ideological circumstances in the historical moment at which it is operative. Although Williams originated this concept in earlier essays (*Preface to Film*, with Michael Orrom [London: Film Drama, 1954]; and *The Long Revolution* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1961]), it is most developed in Williams’ “Structures of Feeling,” in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 128–35. I am using a slightly different sense or queer definition of collectivity: a definition that is based on the condition of double exile of the queer subject, but also of the misfit minority individual. As Gloria Anzaldúa memorably writes, “As a lesbian I have no race, my own

people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.... *Soy un amasamiento* [I am an assemblage], I am the act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings." In *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3rd. ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 102–103.

⁹ For more on Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of minoritarian subjecthood, see their theorization of "minor literature," in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, tr. Dana Polan (1975; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Deleuze's work on masochistic desire as an anti-imperial political subjectivity is discussed in "Coldness and Cruelty," tr. Jean McNeil, in *Masochism* (1967; New York: Zone Books, 1991), 9–138; the function of truly "Masochian" masochism as anti-imperial minoritarian agency in Rhys is discussed in Dell'Amico, see final endnote in this chapter.

¹⁰ For more on the concept of the author-function, see Michel Foucault, "What Is An Author?" (1969) in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Vol. 2: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, tr. Josué V. Harari, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 205–22.

¹¹ Full publication history for Rhys' major fiction is as follows. The short-story collection *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927); the first novel, first published in Britain as *Postures* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1928), appeared in the U.S. under the title *Quartet*, which Rhys preferred (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1929). Further citations are to the Norton edition of *Quartet* (New York: Norton, 1997) and embedded parenthetically in the text. There is some discrepancy about the publication date of the second novel, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931). Athill's edition of *The Complete Novels* record a 1930 U.K. publication date, whereas Elgin W. Mellown's *Jean Rhys: A Descriptive and Annotated Bibliography of Works and Criticism* (New York: Garland, 1984) notes a 1931 publication date for both U.K. and U.S. editions (further citations to Mellown embedded parenthetically in the text). Rhys' first novel, originally called "Triple Sec," was published third in the series as *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Constable, 1934; New York: William Morrow, 1935). Her last novel of the modernist era, *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Constable, 1939), was published on the cusp of the Second World War and garnered little critical attention as a result. *Midnight* appeared in the U.S. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) only after the global success of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (London: Deutsch, 1966; New York: Norton, 1967).

Rhys' complicated publication history highlights the symbolic significance of the life story and the impact on critical reception of the author-function. No less than her fiction, Rhys the modernist, and later the feminist and postcolonial writer, are themselves symbolic meta-representations or myths, which influence and are reinforced by the autobiographical mode of reading Rhys. Such a hermeneutic circle makes the resonance of the author-function or the Rhys legend inescapable from the meanings and effects of the stories themselves. The legend of Rhys as a literary artist begins with the tale of her modest beginnings under Ford Madox Ford's wing, going through the lost years of her

disappearance during the Second World War, to her being presumed dead, to the famous rediscovery by Selma Vaz Díaz in 1949 (and again in 1956) for the latter's adaptation of *Good Morning, Midnight* for BBC radio's Third Programme (May 1957), and finally to Rhys' apotheosis in the wake of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (see Mellow xi–xii). Rhys' late-career honors include being awarded Britain's prestigious W. H. Smith literary award in 1967 and becoming a Commander of the British Empire in 1978. It was Ford who first published Rhys' Left Bank sketches in *The Transatlantic Review* and later became her patron, writing a famous preface to *The Left Bank* ("Preface: Rive Gauche") discussed below. All citations to *Voyage in the Dark* are to the Norton edition.

¹² Mary Lou Emery characterizes these pre—*Wide Sargasso Sea* fictional heroines as presenting a "confused national identity," seeming "‘vaguely’ English," for example, in the case of Marya Zelli of *Quartet*. On the distinction between "English" and *British*, see epigraph, taken from Rhys' Black Black Exercise Book, op. cit., Jean Rhys Papers, University of Tulsa McFarlin Library, OK. Emery, "The Poetics of Labor in Jean Rhys' Global Modernism," *Philological Quarterly* 90.2–3 (2011): 167–197, 168. Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text.

¹³ Rhys's modernist or Continental fictions, as they are usually called, are set in Paris or London, and published in Britain and the U.S. (often translated into French), underscoring Rhys' diasporic, both transnational and transatlantic, position in the twentieth-century "world republic of letters," in Pascale Casanova's resonant phrase (see Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, tr. M.B. DeBevoise [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004]). At times the novels bore different titles across the pond.

¹⁴ Mary Lou Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End": Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), xv. Further references to Emery's monograph embedded parenthetically in the text.

¹⁵ Jed Esty terms Anna Morgan's racial signification as a "girl" "from the island" in the colonial metropole of Britain as "subwhite" (172).

¹⁶ Esty's whole argument rests on the notion of arrested development as epitomized by Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark*. My analysis draws on his insights but is more interested in the affective texture of Rhys' narrative figures and the ideological implications of the "metabildungsroman" surrounding the author-figure of Rhys herself as being in tension.

¹⁷ Here, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's influential account of "reparative" versus "paranoid" reading is a great example of recent critical resistance to such binary and narrow political readings. Cf. Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay Is About You," *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2003], 123–51.

¹⁸ Marianne DeKoven, *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁹ For some background on the recent turn in political theory, literary studies, and cultural criticism from a focus on the term "politics" to the concept of "the political," and to delineating the distinctions between these two terms, see the influential and controversial legal and political theorist Carl Schmidt's *The Concept of the Political*, tr. George Schwab

(1932; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Chantal Mouffe's *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000). Rebecca Walkowitz, in *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), offers a succinct gloss on this turn and the governing rationale behind it. Because this conception of the political touches on large themes in my work regarding re-envisioning modernism as an aesthetic praxis tied to postcolonial and subaltern constituents, who only later became canonized (as Rhys, not to mention Joyce and Woolf, or Stein), as well as, more broadly, about the strictures of political subjectivity for minoritarian subjects disenfranchised even within nascent collectivities, I here quote Walkowitz at length: "Part of the task for new work on individualism and politics has been to introduce a new understanding of what modernism was. Another ... has been to correct past conceptions of modernism by highlighting a greater range of social actors and political affects. In this second gesture, scholars of modernism are emphasizing the relationship of "the political" to "politics," to follow Chantal Mouffe's distinction, where "the political" designates "antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations," whereas "politics" refers to "the ensemble of practices, discourses, and institutions which [...] are affected by the dimension of 'the political' " (Walkowitz 11, Mouffe 101). Walkowitz, quoting Jennifer Wickes, goes on to distinguish how Woolf, for instance, engages with a subtler form of "the political" as a dimension of "everyday life" at a reduced or "miniature scale," not usually associated with the grandiose politics of state and nation, a reduced arena for mobility and agency typically constraining women and other minoritarian subjects the social field of modernity (Wickes qtd in Walkowitz 11). More on the significance of alternative forms of the political—as well as alternative modes of feminist political subjectivity in Rhys—below.

²⁰ As Naipaul notes, *Voyage in the Dark* contains only one reference to public time—the date 1914, significant for its historical significance—and, because the novel was composed and revised over a period of twenty years or so (see below), it has a certain slipperiness as a historical artifact, or as a document of social feeling, rather than personal suffering. And yet, this division between the public and private, social and personal, is at the center of what this project seeks to reconsider: the relation of the novel to historical and personal temporality is in some ways proleptic and belated, never in sync with its own time and place—a typical condition of postcoloniality and the author's own position as a marginal figure within the dominant Left Bank literary culture and the world of Literary London in the 1930s, when the novel finally appeared.

²¹ There is an indeterminacy to the political dimension of Rhys' narratives of inferior being(s) that raises questions about how critical maneuvers resting on discovering a "political unconscious" might not be superseded by ways of reading that attend instead to the affective pattern of a text's aesthetic economy, on its own terms, without recourse to signification, but rather to reception and, in the words of Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, "receptiveness and fidelity to the text's surface, as opposed to suspicious and aggressive attacks on its concealed depths" ("Surface Reading: An Introduction," in "The Way We Read Now," Special Issue of *Representations* 108.1 [2009]: 1–21, 10). There has been much debate about the rejection of ideology critique, a rejection best exemplified by the later work of Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading" (op. cit.), as well as by Love, Rita Felski, and

Best and Marcus, among others. The preponderance of Rhysian criticism, and that of criticism engaged in the redemptive project of identity politics, seek to assign a fairly narrow definition of political efficacy or value, which is the underlying trend my project is seeking to redress. My study is thus situated within queer theory and queer of color critique, and is invested in the promise of different modes of minoritarian identification and disidentification. See, for a key intertext, José Esteban Muñoz's influential *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); the interest in marginal subjectivities disaffiliated from normative and even minoritarian communities, and focusing on anti-collectivity. This latter theoretical conversation involves the so-called antisocial thesis, chiefly represented by Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), further references embedded in the text; and Leo Bersani's generative *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) and "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1988), 197–222 (Rpt. in *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3–30; and work on racial melancholia and other modes of negative affects and self-cancelling ways of being in minoritarian subjects. For other key interlocutors, cf. Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Heather K. Love, *Feeling Backward*, op. cit.; David L. Eng, David Kazanjian, and Judith Butler, eds., *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Tavia Nyong'o, "Brown Punk: Kalup Linzy's Musical Anticipations," *TDR: The Drama Review* 54.3 (2010): 71–86.

I link my way of reading Rhys with recent academic discussions attempting to sidestep the critical protocol of the hermeneutics of suspicion and "symptomatic reading" or ideology critique, by now institutionalized in the humanities. Some of the most important of these interventions include Sedgwick's aforementioned notion of "reparative reading," op. cit. [fn. 8]; Marcus and Best's "surface reading" (op. cit.); Heather Love's reading as "close but not deep," presented in an essay that historicizes this general critical turn away from suspicion (Love, "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," *New Literary History* 41.2 [2010]: 371–91); Franco Moretti's "distant reading" ("Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 [2000]: 54–68, 57); and Rita Felski's "agency of nonhuman actors" (in "Context Stinks!," *New Literary History* 42 [2011]: 573–91) and her forthcoming monograph on what she simply terms "Critique," encompassing the hermeneutics of suspicion, ideology critique, and many other reading protocols based on unmasking the hidden symptoms of texts. Felski's recent work, as well as many others cited in this note, credit the sociologist Bruno Latour as an influential force within this realm of thought, also termed the sociology of literature and the descriptive turn. See especially Latour's *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and "Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 225–48.

²² Readers often know that *Quartet* is a roman à clef, based on Rhys' personal experience with Ford Madox Ford (as his protégée and lover) and Ford's common-law wife, the artist Stella Bowen (unlike the Heidlars, Ford and Bowen were not married).

²³ See Emery's "*Worlds's End*," which represents the critical consensus in dividing Rhys's fiction into the early Continental novels (mostly set in Europe) and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which provincializes (on multiple levels) the European setting as well as European literary tradition by way of its revision of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Further citations to Emery embedded parenthetically in text.

²⁴ For an overview of these readings, see Emery "*World's End*," op. cit., esp. her chapter on *Quartet* (" 'Postures,' Possession, and Point of View," 105–21), and 194n1 and n3.

²⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in "*Race, Writing, and Difference*," ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 262–80. Spivak's famous essay critiques *Jane Eyre* for its championing of a white liberal-humanist female protagonist at the expense of the overtly racialized, denigrated, silenced, and sacrificed, postcolonial subject, Bertha Mason, and has been massively influential in rehabilitating what are seen as the problematic racial politics in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As Shakti Jaising notes in a recent article, "much of the criticism on Rhys' novel came to be structured as a debate about the nature and limits of the black subaltern," figured in the novel as Christophine, Mason's black servant. See Jaising, "Who Is Christophine? The Good Black Servant and the Contradictions of (Racial) Liberalism," *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 56.4 (2010): 815–36, 816. (Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text.) For Jaising, Christophine's devotion and service bring into question her "agency and voice in a narrative written from the perspective of the former plantocracy," the privileged slave-owning caste that Mason and her family belonged to in the novel (816). Such a perspective rankles critics who see racial blind spots in the deployment of a black subaltern to do the work of a "liberal" white-Creole mistress, an ironic doubling of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s own ideological function as a critique of another "liberal" white mistress, Jane Eyre.

²⁶ For one early instance, see Elizabeth Abel's article on Rhys, "Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys," *Contemporary Literature* 20.2 (1979): 155–77. Also, see discussion in the penultimate section and the Conclusion below, including fn70.

²⁷ My reference to "backward feelings" points to Heather K. Love's *Feeling Backward*, op. cit., which is a study of the retrograde states of feeling, being, and thinking that define queer subjects and texts that antedate the gay liberation movement in the late 1960s. My project is indebted to Love's, though I situate my rubric of the misfit minority on a wider intersectional cultural terrain. Figures such as Rhys are not "queer" per se, but certainly evoke the alienation, backward temporality and negative affective and libidinal intensities that define, for me, the misfit minority aesthetic and that also applies to sexual minorities.

²⁸ The line is from *Quartet*, where, toward the end of the affair, Marya "pitifully" accuses Heidler (H.J.) and Lois: "You've smashed me up, you two" (129). The impersonal third-person narrator adds: "That was pitiful because it was so obviously true. It was also in an obscure way rather flattering," not a little perversely focalizing Heidler's point of view, thereby turning against the marginalized protagonist at the very moment where sympathy

toward her situation would be most warranted. Such ambiguity in terms of choosing sides is why Rhys' novel is so resistant to a pure feminist or anti-feminist reading.

²⁹ Edelman's *No Future* focuses on the symbolic figure of the Child as heteronormative guarantee of reproductive futurity. Edelman's polemical and highly influential account draws on Foucault's vision of biopower as the name for the modern state and non-state apparatuses and their political administration of vulnerable bodies and populations—here, in Rhys' world, represented in gendered terms within the heteropatriarchal society of the early twentieth century.

³⁰ Diana Athill, Introduction, *Jean Rhys: The Complete Novels* (New York: Norton, 1985), vii–xiv, ix. Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text. Cf. Athill's editorial edition of the modernist novel series, *Jean Rhys: The Early Novels* (London: André Deutsch, 1984), which has the same biographically inflected chronological arrangement.

³¹ For biographical background on Lancey Smith and Rhys, see Carole Angier's *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), Part One, especially Chapters 2 and 3, 37–83. Angier quotes liberally from "Triple Sec" and *Voyage in the Dark*, emphasizing the importance of the biographical foundations of the fiction, and relevance of the fiction to reconstructing the biography, by seamlessly blending the two in her biography.

³² Wyndham's now perennial preface to *Wide Sargasso Sea* is in fact a revised version of an earlier essay on Rhys, "An Inconvenient Novelist," originally published in *Tribune* 721 (15 December 1950): 16, 18. Mellown considers this "the first major essay on Rhys" (170).

³³ Francis Wyndham, Introduction, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966; New York: Norton, 1982), 5–12.

³⁴ "Plantation modernism" is a concept developed by Amy Clukey. See Clukey's "Plantation Modernism: Irish, Caribbean, and American Fiction, 1890–1950" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2009).

³⁵ I use these Germanic terms for their resonance as symbolic of the highest echelon of modernist achievement: it is not for nothing that Joyce's first novel, *Stephen Hero* / *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is considered a modernist masterpiece as well as a modernist reconception of this genre. For more on the modernist deconstruction of the bildung project of nineteenth-century realism, see Esty's *Fictions of Development*, op. cit. My attempt is to resituate Rhys along a continuum of modernist innovation as well as for their misfit poetics/politics of Caribbean postcolonial feminism, well before these forces solidified as social movements in the second half of the twentieth century. Her novels, as Naipaul rightly notes, were before their time.

³⁶ The famous "Doormat in a world of boots" is uttered by the first-person narrator of Rhys' early short story "Vienne" (in *The Left Bank* 207). Moran uses this resonant phrase as the title to her chapter on Rhys' "masochistic aesthetic"; see below.

³⁷ Carol Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys* (New York: Routledge, 2005). Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text.

³⁸ Judith Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

³⁹ Jean Rhys, *Tigers Are Better Looking* (London: André Deutsch, 1968; New York: Harper & Row, 1974). All references are to the U.S. edition.

⁴⁰ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

⁴¹ Jean Rhys, *Sleep It Off Lady* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976; New York: Penguin, 1979). All references are to the U.S. edition.

⁴² Diana Athill, Introduction, *Jean Rhys: The Collected Short Stories* (New York: Norton, 1987), vii–x, vii. Further references to Athill embedded parenthetically in the text.

⁴³ As noted earlier, this set begins with *Quartet* and ends with *Good Morning, Midnight*—even the titles entail an organic developmental series!

⁴⁴ Yet, Wyndham also claims that *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s "Antoinette Cosway seems a logical development of Marya, Julia, Anna and Sasha, who were also alienated, menaced, at odds with life" (11). A perusal of contemporary reviews of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* indicates the degree to which her aesthetic merit was construed, by an influential modernist literary community ("literary London," in the words of one reviewer), as both extremely narrow in theme yet also extremely accomplished in formal terms.

⁴⁵ Rebecca West, "The Pursuit of Misery in some of the New Novels," *The Daily Telegraph* (30 January 1931). Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁶ C.V.C., "Vivisection," clipping of a review of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, "From the *Daily Herald* (London)" (12 Feb. 1931), np, Jean Rhys Archive, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa (I.1.5). Further citations embedded in the text.

⁴⁷ Writing of Rhys' "constant" thematics of the "outsider"—or, in my terms, the thematics of double exile evinced by the misfit minority writer, as seen in Rhys' representation of "inferior being"—Alvarez states: "This sense of being an outsider unwillingly involved in the intricate social games the British play is constant in Miss Rhys' work. Perhaps this is because she spent the first sixteen years of her life in Domenica [sic]... The dream of a tropical paradise as irretrievably lost as her innocence haunts *Voyage in the Dark*. But it was another quarter of a century before she was able to face it head-on" (4; emphasis added). Here, Alvarez condenses the critical commentary regarding Rhys' major fiction: the autobiographical valence (established by Rhys herself in numerous interviews, and legitimated by Wyndham, as noted above); and, just as important, the teleological structure of Rhys' fiction—and of Rhys' life itself. A. Alvarez, *New York Times Book Review* (17 March 1974): 6–7, 7. Further embedded citations are to the carbon copy typescript, Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 6. Folder 12, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, OK.

⁴⁸ In his review of Rhys' career upon the republication of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, Naipul writes that "the Rhys heroine of the first four [novels] is a woman of mystery, inexplicably bohemian ... appearing to come from no society, having roots in no society, having memories only of places, a woman who has 'lost the way to England' and is adrift in the metropolis" (np, op. cit.). In this manner, Naipul frames the early novels as lacking the sense of place and location—especially *colonial* location—that Rhys achieves in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Naipul concludes his review with his observation of the place of *Mr. Mackenzie* in the Rhys oeuvre, as in my epigraph: "*After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* is the writer's first extended attempt at coming to terms with a chaotic experience; and the brutality of the novel, like the nightmare of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is an essential part of the record" (emphasis added). Seeing the earlier novels as inchoately dealing with the same "chaotic

experience”—and, concomitantly, the same ostensible protagonist, whom Naipul, following the critical consensus established by Wyndham, calls the “Jean Rhys heroine”—Naipul relegates *Mr. Mackenzie* almost to the status of first draft.

⁴⁹ Nancy J. Fulton, “Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Exterminating the White Cockroach,” “Caribbean Literature” edition of *Revista/Review Interamericana* (Fall 1974): 340–49. Further citations embedded in the text.

⁵⁰ Nancy J. Casey (not Fulton yet), “Jean Rhys and the ‘Liberated’ Woman in the Later Short Fiction,” *Revista/Review Interamericana* 4 (Summer 1974): 264–72. Further citations embedded in the text. Although this article cites the later short fiction, Fulton’s later work on *Wide Sargasso Sea* makes the same claim for teleological transcendence and postcolonial identification in the later major fiction.

⁵¹ Cf. Judith “Jack” Halberstam’s contribution in feminist and queer theory to the prevalence and relevance of the structure of feeling that constitutes what she terms the “queer art of failure” (*The Queer Art of Failure* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2011]). Halberstam’s work is a recent addition to this critical conversation, in which my research takes part, which seeks to interrogate such self-evident cultural narratives of subaltern liberation. Queer theory has always been at the vanguard of this effort to dismantle positive visions of political futurity, most famously in works such as Lee Edelman’s *No Future*, op. cit.

⁵² Jean Rhys, Interview with Virginia Browne-Wilkinson, for the BBC program “Women’s Hour,” broadcast 14 Jun 1967 (recorded 30 Jan 1967): 3pp. Jean Rhys Archive, McFarlin Library, Tulsa, OK (1.2.17). Further citations embedded in the text. Rhys also adds, “Of course there may be people with vast imaginations, great people. But I am not one of them,” a typically self-deprecating comment that Naipul, for one, disagrees with (op. cit.).

⁵³ The interviewer, Wilson, states: “It seems to me that Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is very like indeed in some ways to Anna in *Voyage in the Dark*. And at times I find myself thinking of them as the same girl. Do you think of them as one and the same girl?” (3). Rhys equivocates in her response: “I don’t think of the lunatic as . . . as the same as Anna in *Voyage in the Dark*—no. *The Sargasso Sea* [sic] is more an effort of my imagination perhaps. I feel all my girls are a little bit alike” (3).

⁵⁴ Christopher Isherwood, *A Single Man* (1964; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

⁵⁵ Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Gay and Lesbian Historical Emotion Before Stonewall* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). Further references embedded in the text.

⁵⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* [*La Communauté désœuvrée*], tr. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

⁵⁷ “Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose” early drafts in typescript indicate “The Birthday” as the story’s original title. See Jean Rhys Archive, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, OK (1.3.20).

⁵⁸ Jean Rhys, “Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose,” *Sleep It Off Lady* (op. cit.), 23–30, 30. Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text. (Originally published in *The New Yorker* 52 [30 August 1976]: 26–27.)

⁵⁹ Kenneth Ramchand, Introduction, *Tales of the Wide Caribbean* (London: Heinemann, 1985), 21 pp (np), p. 14 (pagination mine). Further citations embedded in the text.

⁶⁰ “The virgin, she calls me,” Anna says, referring to her dressing-room mate, Laurie Gaynor: “Can’t you manage to keep the door shut, Virgin, you silly cow?” (16). This scene occurs in Part One, chapter 1, of the novel, setting up the basic situation of Anna’s young womanhood as a displaced Caribbean and as sexually immature—although ironically as a Chorus girl already has the social and symbolic associations with “tarts,” in the novel’s double-voiced misogynist parlance (Anna is half-reading Nana as the novel begins, and her landlady accuses her of being a “tart” for staying out late (30), before Anna actually even has her first sexual experience, with Jeffries (37).

⁶¹ Walter says he works in the City of London, hence the financial district (14), making him at the very least a part of the moneyed class. It is not certain whether he is from aristocratic stock or not. The other question—Is Walter married?—is largely unanswerable. The mating rituals between him and Anna, and his friend and Anna’s friend Maudie, largely depend on being as cagey as possible—“as if he had sized me up” in an instant, Anna says at their first meeting, without knowing anything about her (for she hadn’t yet told him her origin story—that comes later)—an accidental rendezvous that turns into something more as the novel progresses (14).

⁶² In an early exchange, Maudie asks Anna what her stepmother will think if Anna decides to “chuck the tour” and stop working as a Chorus Girl altogether (46): “‘What about your stepmother?’ Maudie said. ‘What’ll she think if you chuck the tour? Are you going to chuck it?’ ‘I don’t know what she’ll think,’ I said. ‘I don’t suppose she’ll think anything.’ ‘Well, I call that funny,’ Maudie said. ‘I will say that for your stepmother. She doesn’t seem to be at all inquisitive, does she?’ ” (46). Not being “at all inquisitive e” is Maudie’s euphemism for Hester Morgan’s obvious neglect of her stepdaughter, regardless of Anna’s largely defenseless situation as an orphaned young woman, penniless—her father’s inheritance of the Constance Estate in Jamaica has gone to Hester, and Anna has gotten very little from it, a sore point in the novel and between Hester and her brother-in-law, Anna’s Uncle Bo—five pounds for Christmas, at one point. See *Voyage in the Dark* I.6 (57–74) for the Hester encounter and 18 for an early example of her miserly generosity.

⁶³ As noted by Jaising, op. cit., this is a serious issue in Rhys criticism, the legitimate concern that the fiction presumes to “speak for” (or what is worse, fails to speak for) a Black Caribbean subject, situating this secondary figure in the patronizing position of providing service and maternal labor. This issue comes up with Francine in *Voyage* and of course with Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The relations between Creole and Black female characters are affectively charged and are presented as complex emotional attachments. This was a raging debate in postcolonial studies in the mid-1990s. For a sense of the back-and-forth, see Elaine Savory’s *Jean Rhys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. Chapter 9, “The Helen of Our Wars: Cultural Politics and Jean Rhys Criticism,” 206ff, which discusses Edward Kamau Braithwaite’s critique of Rhys’ latter-day cultural redemption as a Caribbean writer by a white critical establishment after her earlier critical positioning as “The Best Living English Novelist,” in A. Alvarez’s resonant phrase (discussed above; further citations to Savory embedded parenthetically in the text).

Braithwaite, in *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974), famously argued that such redemptions of white Creole writers such as Rhys displaces the potential for discovering Black authors and texts of the Antilles: “White Creoles in the ... West Indies have separated themselves by too wide a gulf and have contributed too little culturally, as a group, to give credence to the notion that they can, given the present structure, meaningfully identify, or be identified, with the spiritual world on this side of the Sargasso Sea” (38, qtd in Savory 206–07). Cf. Savory’s “Jean Rhys, Race and Caribbean / English Criticism,” *Wasafiri* 14.28 (1998): 33–34. See also Braithwaite’s earlier manifesto, in “A Post-Crutionary [sic] Tale of the Helen of Our Wars,” *Wasafiri* 11.22 (1995): 69–78, in which he responds to critics like Peter Hulme. Braithwaite critiques Rhys’ position in the field of postcolonial studies as “the Helen of our wars,” or the cause of much conflict regarding who should be lionized and become the proper subject and object of postcolonial representation and criticism, thereby calling attention to Rhys’ cultural and symbolic role, as the acceptable white (Creole) face whom white critics glom on to, rather than privileging Black voices and faces by Black Caribbean authors. The feminist politics of this deployment of the discourse of “Helen” and “Wars” is problematic in and of itself, and beyond the scope of this chapter to address in its full complexity. But my main argument about Rhys’ mythic function—as meta-textual bildungsheld and bildungsroman—is supported by Braithwaite’s “Helen” piece, which similarly discusses Rhys’ extra-textual cultural and symbolic role in the field of critical and literary practice, beyond the particulars of her writing (though understandably he critiques her texts’ deployment of Black female characters). As Savory notes, Braithwaite’s “work has been to restore subordinated African identities within West Indian culture,” and his critique of Rhys’ novels “insisted that the socio-political realities of Caribbean culture would prevent Tia and Antoinette [in *Wide Sargasso Sea*] from having more than a childhood playmate connection, as opposed to a strongly affectionate relationship” (207). This last point itself cannot be displaced from its original context, Savory warns: In 1974 Braithwaite “was working in a cultural climate in the West Indies that, despite the immediate political impact of the U.S. Black Power movement, education in the history of Africa was still largely sketchy for the general public” (207). Braithwaite’s intervention in the celebration of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is thus important and in no way, today, takes away from feminist and postcolonial understandings of the text’s importance and political work. The question of “who benefits?” bedevils feminism as it does postcolonial studies. Yet, neither can we take for granted the deployment of masculinist discourse in order to oppose the white privilege of cultural representation within an Anglophone symbolic economy. For more on symbolic and other forms of non-monetary capital, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, tr. Richard Nice (1979; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), and, for a critique of the literary and artistic spheres of reception and taste, see Bourdieu’s *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, tr. Susan Emanuel (1992; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). Rhys’ late-in-coming apotheosis as a celebrated literary artist is an interesting case for all of these reasons and contexts; she is a “cross-roads figure” and “total misfit” indeed.

⁶⁴ Anna Morgan's stepmother, Hester Morgan, lives in England, and, when Anna visits her, they have a tortured exchange (Part I, Chapter 6: 57–74). At one particularly heated moment, Anna blurts out, "You're always trying to make out that my mother was coloured," while Hester denies this charge. And yet, in response, Hester hectors Anna about her upbringing: "I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and behave like a lady and not like a [n-word] and of course I couldn't do it," showing how racialized and colonized this notion of "a lady" is: it means bourgeois and domestic, daughter of a plantocracy, and not mixing with the "coloured" "servants" (65).

⁶⁵ For more on my conception of "affective realism," see the Introduction to this Dissertation, and Chapter 1, on Wallace Thurman and the Harlem Renaissance.

⁶⁶ I hesitate to follow the gendered norm of calling male characters by their surname, female characters by their first name, but I may not resist this convention all the time.

⁶⁷ Indeed, the swift nature of the unfolding of events is striking: Anna makes Walter's acquaintance in Chapter 1; their first date is related in Chapter 2; and their first sexual contact occurs in Chapter 3. Some time passes between Chapters 1 and 2—it is October at the beginning of Chapter 1, but by the end of the chapter "it was winter"—some days before Monday the 15th of November, to be exact—and the revue is in the off-season, and Anna is living in London, rather than on tour in Southsea, which is where she met Walter (18–19). Chapter 1 ends with Walter's letter to Anna, which she shows Maudie and the other Chorus Girls in the dressing room, requesting a date with her "on Monday" (19). Maudie wisely suggests that Anna should say she had a previous engagement and instead suggest "Wednesday, the 17th of November" (19). The importance of dates—and the other kind of date—and how to play the sexual-dating game is here almost comical, and serves to again demonstrate Anna's status as ingénue and the status of Maudie, Laurie Gaynor—and every other female character in the book save her stepmother, ironically enough—as Anna's inductees or mentors in the ways of the world. During this exchange, where they urge Anna not to be readily available to Walter, in order to increase her scarcity and thus increase her relative value as a commodity and as sexual agent (determining the date of contact at least), Laurie says, "I'm teaching her etiquette" (19).

⁶⁸ "[Mr. Jeffries] didn't look at my breasts or my legs, *as they usually do*. Not that I saw. He looked straight at me and listened to everything I said with a polite and attentive expression, and then he looked away and smiled as if he had sized me up" (13–14; emphasis added to show Anna's oddly wise naiveté—she seems to know something about the sexual predatory game—as they usually do implies experience—but not enough to prevent having to play it, nor with a losing hand).

⁶⁹ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁷⁰ This enigmatic passage seems to situate the remembered scene of sexual exploitation in Anna's recent past, when she lived with Ethel Matthews (Parts II–III, 130ff), and assisted Ethel by doing manicures in the latter's home-based nail salon and spa.

⁷¹ The reference to W. E. B. Du Bois' luminous concept of double consciousness is deliberate. As a racially indeterminate subject—a racial misfit—Anna Morgan is white and Creole but also suspected of being "coloured," according to her stepmother's insinuations.

During their brief meeting in London, in Part One, Anna accuses Hester: “You’re trying to make out that my mother was coloured ... You always did try to make that out. She wasn’t” (65). Besides being Anna’s stepmother, Hester is also the text’s epitome of a viciously proper “English gentlewoman,” with “an English lady’s voice with a sharp, cutting edge to it” (57). Not coincidentally, Hester is also quite racist, and a highly unsympathetic character with shockingly low sense of filial piety; it is her abandonment of Anna after her father’s death that leads Anna down the path of poverty and abandonment—and moments of self-abandonment, as we have seen. For an early, redemptive reading of Rhys’ depictions of race, see Jordan Stouk, “Alternative Narratives of Race, Time and Gender,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 3.1 (1995): 53–59.

⁷² See Braithwaite, op. cit.

⁷³ Walter calls her “my infantile Anna,” emphasizing her youth, naiveté, and vulnerability.

⁷⁴ For a more recuperative understanding of Rhys’ representation of multiple and at times conflicting social codes of “inferior being,” see Andrea Lewis, “Immigrants, Prostitutes, and Chorus Girls: National Identity in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 6.2 (1999): 82–95.

⁷⁵ See, for instance, Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 121–31, where he states that mimicry “represents an ironic compromise” in the “conflictual economy of colonial discourse” (122). For Butler, see *Gender Trouble*, op. cit.

⁷⁶ Helen Nebeker, *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage: A Critical Study of the Novels of Jean Rhys* (Montreal, QC: Eden Press Women’s Publications, 1981). Further citations embedded parenthetically in text.

⁷⁷ For instance, Emery’s “*World’s End*” reading of *Quartet* does a fine job of contextualizing the Freud vs. Karen Horney debate about women and masochism. Dell’Amico and Moran delve into an *aesthetic* of masochism, not a psychological but a formalist reading of Rhys’s fiction, going beyond “diagnoses” of the author herself. In her chapter on Rhys and Joseph Conrad, Dell’Amico usefully sets up the “problem” of masochism in Rhys and the feminist debate regarding masochism tout court. Dell’Amico states that said problem “remains a sticking point in the criticism,” a critical quagmire that renders “[a]ny given textual detail” from a Rhys novel—especially her modernist ones—“will constitute a devastating portrayal of a woman internalizing and playing out misogyny for one critic, while to the next [critic] it will be ... evidence of Rhys’ disturbing commitment to traditional female submissions” (61). As noted, Dell’Amico’s solution to this textual crux is to read Rhys’ modernist novels from the point of view of an alternative theory of masochism—that of Gilles Deleuze’s early reading of the Leopold von Sacher-Masoch literary archive in “Coldness and Cruelty,” tr. Jean McNeil, in *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 9–138. The function of an oppositional, “Masochian” masochism as anti-imperial in Rhys is discussed by Dell’Amico, who claims that Rhys’ “masochistic fictions” do “not in fact indicate submission but rather ... *contestation* of oppressive authority,” where said authority is patriarchal and colonial (58, emphasis in original). Patricia Moran’s work on the “aesthetics of trauma” in Virginia Woolf and Rhys argues that the latter’s fiction manifests

a “masochistic aesthetic.” Cf. Moran, *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), esp. Chapter 6, “‘A Doormat in a World of Boots’: Jean Rhys and the Masochistic Aesthetic,” 115–47. Such an aesthetic originates, Moran claims, from the persistence of trauma in the Rhys life-story, noting especially the unpublished *Black Exercise Book*, op. cit.; this originary trauma finds symbolic representation in formal or aesthetic terms in Rhys’ fiction. It is important for her purposes that Moran’s monograph situates itself in the intersection of feminist life-writing, which warrants a biographically inflected yet formalist reading of Rhys’ complex fictions of feminine and female passivity and negativity. In the “Masochistic Aesthetic” chapter, Moran explains the hermeneutic chain that links trauma, trauma theory, and masochism in Rhys. Moran writes that masochism “functions as a complex response to psychic trauma,” and she “locates the impulse for masochistic submission” in Rhys by way of reference to Emmanuel Ghent’s influential theory of masochism as the desire for surrender that turns into a penchant for submission (116). Cf. Emmanuel Ghent, “Masochism, Submission, Surrender,” *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 26.1 (1990): 108–36. Ghent himself, Moran reminds us, argues that masochism has “often been traced to ... traumata,” thereby adducing Ghent’s psychogenetic account of masochism to warrant her biographically inflected analysis of Rhys’ masochistic aesthetic (Ghent 116, qtd in Moran 116). Leaving aside Moran’s psychogenetic hermeneutic operation whereby biography is, if not destiny, then determining, it is interesting that both Dell’Amico and Moran use a Deleuzian lens for apprehending the masochism they find in Rhys’ work. Deleuze’s influential essay on the literary entailments of masochism has had many entailments of its own, not least its indifference to sexual difference, or its conception of masochism as a masculine oedipal erotics of submission, where basically the male masochist humiliates the father by staging the perverse idealization of the mother substitute (or the “female torturer,” in Deleuze’s terms). There are myriad feminist critiques (and celebrations) of Deleuze’s transgressively Oedipal model of (indicatively male) masochism in “Coldness and Cruelty.” See, for a brief summary, John Kucich’s *Imperial Masochism: British Fiction, Fantasy, and Social Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), esp. 18–21. Kucich summarizes Deleuze’s quintessentially oedipal characterization of masochism as a case in point, in order to illustrate the interpretive morass such oedipal conceptualization entails, especially for feminist or otherwise politically attuned literary-cultural critics seeking to determine the ideological valence of masochism—is masochism reactionary or radical?—in the specifically Deleuzian or generally Freudian mold. Kucich offers literary critics a refreshingly differential, object-relations theory of masochism, based not on sexual (or oedipal) dynamics, but on compensatory fantasies of omnipotence, narcissistic fantasies linked to the infantile (or pre-oedipal) subject’s helpless attachment to indifferent or harmful primary caregivers and their eventual proxies. For an early and thus notable psychiatric reading, see Elizabeth Abel, op. cit.

CHAPTER 3

Isherwood's Impersonality:

Ascetic Self-Divestiture and Queer Relationality In *A Single Man*

Introduction

Christopher Isherwood's novel *A Single Man* portrays a gay man as an ordinary human being. For its time, the novel's depiction of homosexuality as a legitimate minoritarian identity, rather than individual pathology, was a radical political gesture. Given this context, literary critics see the novel as anticipating gay liberation. Claude Summers, for instance, declares, "the minority consciousness of homosexuals and their oppression are crucial themes of *A Single Man*" (xiii).¹ The critical commonplace shows acceptance of the novel's incontrovertible identity politics: *A Single Man* champions an ordinary gay man as synecdoche for a burgeoning homosexual community, a political minority consciousness. Yet, as my argument will demonstrate, *A Single Man* endorses an ascetic ethos of queer impersonality, which pervades the majority of the novel's scenes of sociability and attachment. That impersonal asceticism severely qualifies the notion that *A Single Man* celebrates identity politics as the primary strategic weapon of literary-cultural gay activism. More broadly, my argument is that Isherwood's ethos of impersonality is evident in a broader conception of the Isherwood archive, from *The Berlin Stories* to *My Guru and His Disciple*. *The Berlin Stories* are celebrated for their aesthetic of impersonal detachment, Isherwood's eponymous narrator exemplifying Georg Simmel's figure of "the stranger."² In the wake of gay liberation and the Stonewall Era, however, critics and

Isherwood both have reframed his career as a gradual coming-out process after his expatriation to the U.S. in 1939. The “American” Isherwood, to borrow James Berg’s phrase, became a staunch advocate of gay rights. Isherwood’s later writings depict homosexual themes and scenes openly, which makes Isherwood’s 1930s writings seem quaintly closeted by comparison. At least, this is the dominant critical view of the Isherwood archive.

I do not dispute that Isherwood evolved into an outspoken author on behalf of what he himself called the gay male tribe.³ Isherwood’s *Christopher and His Kind* recapitulates the Berlin years in autobiographical form, with the agenda of disclosing what had been veiled before. Isherwood, no less than his gay critics, viewed his pre-War writings as self-censored. In *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood regards *Lions and Shadows* as “not truly autobiographical,” for “the author conceals important facts about himself.” This is a value judgment, considering that Isherwood’s memoir is dedicated to divulging the secrets of his Berlin years, starting with the reason he expatriated to Berlin. Isherwood adds, “when *Lions and Shadows* suggests that Christopher’s chief motive for going to Berlin was that he wanted to meet [anthropologist John] Layard, it is avoiding the truth” (2). That truth was that “Christopher was then unwilling to discuss [the] sexual significance” (3) of his move to Berlin—namely, that “Berlin meant Boys” (2). Isherwood, thus, famously critiques his own pre-War writings as “too much fiction and too little frankness” (3). *Christopher and His Kind* is an “after Stonewall” memoir framed as a belated account of Isherwood’s sexual emancipation: so, the American Isherwood seems dedicated to the frankness of autobiography and the politics of visibility of gay liberation.

But the standard readings of Isherwood fall victim to the notion, critiqued by Michel Foucault, that the truth of the self is a sexual truth—a tendency still rampant in accounts of the 1960s, an era defined in hindsight by the cultural logic of gay liberation and the sexual revolution. Perhaps coincidentally, the original French edition of *The History of Sexuality* and *Christopher and His Kind* came out in the same year, occupying seemingly opposite poles in the cultural politics of gay liberation. Foucault's is a demystification of the abiding truth-claims of sexual (including homosexual) cultural politics, whereas Isherwood's is a qualified deployment of this very logic of identity.

I take *Christopher and His Kind* to be a qualified deployment of the visibility discourse of gay liberation because, given Isherwood's artistic investment in impersonality as a modernist aesthetic doctrine, his use of memoir in the latter stages of his career is in tension with this doctrine.⁴ So even as *Christopher and His Kind* is dedicated to divulging the sexual secrets of the Berlin years in an ideological deployment of Isherwood's gay politics, Isherwood's sensibility of impersonality and self-divestiture is legible in this memoir as well, though less so than in his more self-vaporizing fictional narratives such as *A Single Man*, as we see below. Isherwood subscribed to a distinction between the aesthetic orders of fiction and nonfiction, legible in his phrase “too much fiction and too little frankness” to describe the earlier novels and memoirs. Even so, *Christopher and His Kind* maintains formal if not political allegiance to Isherwood's aesthetic doctrine of impersonality, a modernist principle that is a permanent feature of his oeuvre.⁵

Given this introduction, the argument that follows revises the dominant Isherwood narrative. Rather than read *A Single Man* as laying the groundwork for his autobiographical

1960s writings,⁶ which embrace homosexuals as a legitimate minority, I argue for Isherwood's aesthetic commitment to an ascetic ideal of impersonality, a "queer" ideal in a non-identitarian sense. The novel privileges this ideal with a governing thematic of the divestment of possessive personhood, in terms of collective or personal interest. With the aid of the anti-identitarian theoretical frameworks of Tim Dean, Leo Bersani, and Lauren Berlant, I read *A Single Man* as projecting an impersonal queer ethos. For my purposes, Bersani encapsulates this mode of queer impersonality as the "ascesis of an ego-divesting discipline" (*Intimacies* 35). Impersonal asceticism involves the urge to suspend or violate the self's personal integrity, to transcend the self, even evacuate personality, through means such as ritual. Such rituals can be as simple as performative displays of self-abnegation, as we will see in *A Single Man*, which stages scenes that serve the protagonist's desire for negative self-transcendence in the service of an impersonal ascetic ideal.

My main contention is that *A Single Man* champions an impersonal queer ascesis, narratively staged in scenes depicting George, the protagonist, engaged in self-abnegating gestures. Thus, the novel represents Isherwood's impersonal ascetic ideal and queer ethics of relationality. One form of ascetic escape from the self is disidentification from cultural (or subcultural) identity. Another register of queer impersonality is the escape from the personal, as opposed to the cultural, self. The boundary between the two, of course, is not at all clear: the personal and the political bleed into each other, especially in a novel that foregrounds the importance of minority social identity.⁷ My argument isolates four main thematic representations of ascetic self-divestiture and queer impersonality in the novel, which also tend to bleed into one another: (1) what I am calling detached attachment to

others, often mediated by negative affects, such as envy or hate; (2) performativity and role-playing; (3) political disidentification from one's prescribed social identity; and (4) self-inflicted injury. Ultimately, the significance of *A Single Man*'s valorization of ascetic self-divestiture and queer impersonality, in scenes that divest the ego of significance, lies in transcending the normative claims of the personal and the political. Such a queer impersonal aesthetic is ideologically inconsistent with the (albeit qualified) project of gay visibility in *Christopher and His Kind*.

In this sense, Isherwood's novel is more queer than gay; George may represent a single gay man, but the novel's ascetic ideal and ethos of queer impersonality argues against reading the narrative as a cultural instrument for gay identitarian representation. Indeed, at the basic, formal level, Isherwood's aesthetic of queer impersonality is evident in his consistent use of an external third-person narrator even in his nonfiction. The impersonal ascetic ideal argues against possessive investment in a political homosexual identity. Indeed, I argue that the ascetic impersonality in *A Single Man* is in direct tension with the novel's representation of gay identity as a minority consciousness.

By contrast, the asceticism and queer forms of detached attachment depicted in *A Single Man* articulate an alternative or "misfit" vision of minority subjectivity: the novel calls George and others of his kind "nonconformists." This vision clearly departs from the novel's farcical presentation of George's rage as a grotesquely violent passion keyed in his consciousness as a gay "minority-sister," in the novel's famous formulation. The novel instead stages departures from the liberal principles of possessive personhood, as well as token versions of tolerance and equality, in favor of a queer ethos of ascetic impersonality.⁸

Isherwood's relationship to queer history is a vexed one. Pace his own increasingly vocal advocacy in the 1960s, it would behoove us to analyze the fiction to glean Isherwood's concerted stance toward the aesthetic politics of gay liberation. Here, generic distinctions are decisive. Isherwood's derogation of *Lions and Shadows* (and *The Berlin Stories*) as "too much fiction and too little frankness" lays bare his modernist aesthetic of queer impersonality. Isherwood's fiction adheres to an aesthetic doctrine defined by an ethos of queer impersonality and a self-dissolving ascetic ideal, both reflective of Isherwood's minoritarian non-conformity with identity politics. This literary practice exemplifies the cultural concept of the "misfit minority," even in the face of a paradigm shift in cultural politics with gay liberation. In an important sense, Isherwood's late-career turn to autobiography and nonfiction memoir is explained by his modernist autotelic doctrine of fictional representation. Art could never truly function for Isherwood as propaganda, which is why he revisits Berlin not in fictional *Stories*, but in factual autobiography, in order to better effect a turn toward identity politics that his approach to literary representation, and his aesthetic of the ascetic ideal of queer impersonality, did not allow. By his own admission, *Lions and Shadows* fails the test of "frankness" of nonfictional autobiography that Isherwood's later memoirs take up. Isherwood's novels follow this logic of generic distinction, which distances fiction from the claims of real-life factuality or frankness, which Isherwood maintains was properly the province of non-fictional autobiography.⁹ As noted, however, even in the mode of memoir, Isherwood formally maintains an impersonal remainder not subsumed under the aegis of pure political advocacy. His reliance on third-person narration even in the mode of political

autobiography signals his continued skepticism toward the entailments of identity even as he paradoxically mobilized impersonal form to advance a liberationist agenda.

The next section develops Bersani's concept of ascetic impersonality and Berlant's notion of sovereign subjectivity in order to ground my argument regarding *A Single Man*'s queer non-conformist or misfit-minoritarian ethos of impersonality and ascetic self-divestiture. Then, I consider important moments from the novel that stage this ideal and practice. In the conclusion, I return to the issue of Isherwood's political investments in gay representation and misfit-minority consciousness, arguing that the theme of ascetic impersonality in *A Single Man* helps us reconceive Isherwood's oeuvre as developing an aesthetic politics of principled detachment from personal and collective projects.

Ultimately, I am arguing for a broader recuperation of Isherwood's before-Stonewall queer poetics and politics, including the use of the impersonal *Berlin* narrator, denigrated as "sexless" by Edmund White (2), among others. Rather than read Isherwood's long career as divided thematically by the event of Stonewall, as many critics do, I maintain that his modernist aesthetic practice values queer impersonality and ascetic self-divestiture, and that his literary positioning does not ultimately conform to the claims of identity politics in the Stonewall narrative of modern gay liberation. His outspoken advocacy as an author on behalf of gay rights must not overshadow his literary valorization of ascetic impersonality and nonconformist queer consciousness. *A Single Man* projects a political spirituality invested and divested of possessive personhood and what poet Reginald Shepherd calls the prescriptive and restrictive burdens of minority identity (11). Indeed, Isherwood protected his fiction from devolving into "political propaganda," to

borrow the vocabulary of his time. Throughout his career, Isherwood sustained an early-developed identification with the modernist ideal of the autonomy of art.¹⁰ This aesthetic ideal, I argue, explains his 1960s turn away from literary fiction to nonfiction autobiography: his embrace of gay liberation entailed a different genre of writing practice. His fictional works, I believe, remain ambivalent about the claims of homosexuality as a political identity.

My argument thus finds continuity in the Isherwood archive, before and after Stonewall, whereas most critics find a break in his turn toward American-style identity politics as an engaged gay author.¹¹ The Isherwood of the earlier fictional works, in short, is more queer than gay. It is only if we measure Isherwood according to the dictates of our own contemporary frame of Stonewall that his pre-1970s works seem closeted by comparison. I think we should celebrate the impersonal *Berlin Stories* and Isherwood's ego-attenuating and impersonal queerness, an ethos represented in early and later novels alike.

Ascetic Self-Divestiture and Lateral Agency

Leo Bersani's *Intimacies* names a form of self-attenuation that we might find articulated in *A Single Man*.¹² Bersani locates the cultural practice of ascetic self-divestiture in a particular form of seventeenth-century mysticism, a practice of radical submission to an impersonal divine being that invades and annihilates the self. Isherwood's novel exemplifies this form of self-annihilating impersonality.¹³ In a sense, the opposite of self-divestiture that Bersani—and, I argue, Isherwood—represent is the conventional conception of identity. In the same chapter in which he elaborates the impersonal ascetic

ideal, Bersani recapitulates his notion of self-shattering in relation to sexual jouissance.¹⁴ In *Intimacies*, he touches on the “at once violently aggressive and self-shattering ego-hyperbolizing of racial, national, ethnic, and gendered identities” (55). This phrase implies that minoritarian social identity is consolidated at the expense of openness to the other.¹⁵ By contrast, Bersani analyzes the mystics’ surrender to an inhuman or anonymous other, to whom one grants affective, cognitive, and perhaps sexual access, to the point of self-erasure. Bersani’s “pure love” mystics exemplify the self-shattering embrace of alterity (51–55, *passim*). These ascetics represent the opposite of normative self-mastery or what one might call executive personhood.

Lauren Berlant’s concept of lateral agency, too, is helpful here. Berlant’s lateral agent shrinks from the sovereign mode of subjectivity. The latter is linked to the self-obsessed power wielded by Bersani’s “ego-hyperbolizing” subject. Berlant cites as an ordinary example of sovereign subjectivity the impulse to go to the gym. The subject’s investment in futurity and development—bettering one’s physical form by regular exercise—is an effective strategy or a strategy of being effective. This example illustrates what psychologist Roy Baumeister terms “high-level self-awareness”—of oneself as the subject of *bildung*, the teleological, or theological, self (“Masochism as Escape from Self” 24). This self depends on a timocratic notion of personhood in our society, in Orlando Patterson’s terms—a self-mythologizing leader of men. Sovereign personhood, and its extension as sovereign agency, is anathema to self-divesting subjects, among which my interest is in misfit minorities, who remain lateral. They remain at the margins of scenes of collective triumph, even minoritarian collectives. The lateral agent, in contrast to gym-

frequenting overachiever, habitually skips the gym: spreading out, rather than moving forward. According to Berlant, lateral self-management occurs when people stop trying to build personal monuments to themselves. In these moments of lateral, as opposed to vertical, self-extension, the subject thinks in terms of inertia, impasse, and immediate if ephemeral satisfaction. In some ways, “thinking” is the wrong term for these self-suspending scenes of inhabiting oneself without building one’s life as a narrative of development. Sovereign subjects negotiate what Baumeister calls the “burden of selfhood” (29). The ascetic subject spreads himself laterally to escape this burden, in what Berlant calls “small vacations from the will” (“Slow Death” 779).¹⁶

Berlant’s concept of the lateral agent seems, on the surface, to have little to do with what counts as agency proper. Socially symbolic forms of action—such as being thin, wearing shoes that match, and other ordinary practices of self-management—represent a burden that individuals sometimes put aside. Certain individuals adopt lateral moves rather than vertical trajectories of self-extension, remaining stuck. Her social phenomenology seeks to articulate the many ways in which individuals are engaged in nonsovereign forms of being themselves, of being ordinary, of lacking “effective” agency, thereby evincing “desires not to be an inflated ego deploying and manifesting power” (“Slow Death” 757).

Bersani and Berlant share the sense that certain modes of living entail an alternative aesthetics of existence.¹⁷ My interest in this critical framework is how it illuminates minoritarian negotiations with the double burden of normative personhood and minoritarian uplift. In ordinary habits of impersonal self-suspension, these lateral investments represent a queer way of being in the world. Rather than centering oneself on

personal interest, the lateral agent, or Bersani's impersonal ascetic, looks to self-divestiture as a means of acceding to otherness—including the otherness within—and inhabiting the world in a non-normative or queer ethical relation. The forms of political possibility that such anti-imperial self-elaboration allow is a key question for me, and for Bersani and Berlant, who valorize queerness not as an identity free from the constraints of power, but as an impersonal mode of relationality that dissipates rather than consolidates authority over others and the self.

As my reading of *A Single Man* illustrates, Isherwood's aesthetic is devoted to such an impersonal ascetic ideal and a queer ethos, without reducing queerness to sexual identity. The novel dramatizes and epitomizes the misfit minority position—chiefly its protagonist's—in scenes of impersonal negotiation and self-abnegation. These scenes suggest that *A Single Man* should not be filtered through a retrofitted lens of gay liberation, at least not primarily. Rather, the novel explores queer impersonality through the suspension of personality and political identity in decidedly unheroic ways.

“I am with you, little minority-sister”: Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The central instance representing the minority consciousness of *A Single Man* occurs during George's turn at the podium in the lecture hall, when he discusses Aldous Huxley's *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939). The classroom scene turns on George's impassioned critique of “pseudoliberal sentimentality” (71). More specifically, the discussion is sparked by a question raised by Huxley's novel. A student asks whether Huxley was an anti-Semite for declaring the stupidity of the biblical text, “they hated me

without cause” (69). This is a central theme in the novel: Multiculturalism in Los Angeles and the relationship between minorities and the U.S. liberal state, during the Cold War. Isherwood’s novella identifies the hegemony of liberal thought with George’s neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Strunk, who function as the personification of this “blandly annihilating” U.S. liberal majority: “Mrs. Strunk ... is trained in the new tolerance, the technique of annihilation by blandness” (27). The Strunks represent liberal tolerance toward minorities, a political category that in Isherwood’s novel clearly includes homosexuals. Such tolerance, however, as we will see from George’s lecture, is a form of domesticating the strangeness—or otherness—that minoritarian subjects represent. So, while integration into the polity is a chief political goal, such integration carries its risks. Isherwood knew this as a lifelong thinker regarding the challenges that cultural identity posed to large-scale political systems such as democratic liberalism in Britain and the Communisms and fascisms of an earlier era.¹⁸

The classroom scene foregrounds George’s perspective that social exchanges are never between, say, absolutely privileged and absolutely disenfranchised subjects. Rather, the narrative presents, in principle, the social contingency and relativity of power. Particularly in this scene, the novel notes how power and resistance operate on a sliding scale and vary by context. A privileged British accent helps George deal with a world from which he feels excluded, for instance. The novel shows how relatively privileged and less privileged individuals make use of, or even exploit, the sociocultural assets at their disposal.

A Single Man’s treatment of the relative nature of class and other institutionalized forms of privilege rejects liberal pressure to ignore social differences in the name of equality.

Since the novel implies that paying lip service to equality is a way of avoiding the reality of oppression and resistance, George argues against this facile solution:

Minorities are people—people, not angels. Sure, they’re like us—but not exactly like us.... It’s better if we admit to disliking and hating them than if we try to smear our feelings over with pseudo-liberal sentimentality. If we’re frank about our feelings, we have a safety valve; and if we have a safety valve, we’re actually less likely to start persecuting. (71)

The heart of the scene rests in disputing the liberal notion that majorities persecute the other without cause and, relatedly, that minoritarian subjects are paragons of virtue (“angels”), innocent of all hate. By contrast, George lectures his students that there is always a cause for hate. He asserts that the cause for hate is the majority’s perception of the other as a threat, even if this hate is imaginary and without merit, regardless of what liberal sentimentality says (70). George describes a world where hate begets hate and aggression begets aggression—no matter how imaginary the causes for the hatred of the other, the hatred exists, and those so disenfranchised by power react in kind with their “own kind of aggression”:

A minority has its own kind of aggression. It absolutely dares the majority to attack it. It hates the majority—not without a cause, I grant you. It even hates the other minorities, because all minorities are in competition: each one proclaims that its sufferings are the worst and its wrongs the blackest. And the more they all hate, and the more they’re all persecuted, the nastier they become! (72)

This passage resonates as an implicit explanation of George’s own hate of the “Mr. [and Mrs.] Strunks of the world” and, by synecdoche, of heteronormative society. The novel spends a great deal of time—especially in the driving scene that shortly precedes George’s classroom tirade—describing George’s rage and detailing his murderous fantasies as “Uncle George,” in which he effects a large-scale campaign of terror on the civilized world.

Putting aside the politically untenable posture that George assumes in this rant,¹⁹ George's tirade represents a powerful if silent advocacy for homosexuality as a protected minority. His lecture articulates the political desire to end the persecution of others by allowing democratic subjects to speak the "unspeakable," which is George's term for negative affects repressed by the norms of "pseudoliberal sentimentality." Such a belief in speaking truth to power—confess your sins and you shall be free—follows a 1960s cultural logic against repression. This logic, in the form of the so-called repressive hypothesis, was Michel Foucault's principal target in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*.

Unenlightened by this Foucauldian critique, George expounds the cultural belief that releasing one's social prejudices and blindspots creates, in his terms, a social "safety valve" that dissipates the hate and aggression that we all share. More importantly, George argues that voicing prevailing negative attitudes toward the other prevents the eventual return of the majority's aggression in the political form of persecution ("if we have a safety valve, we're actually less likely to start persecuting"). This line of thinking is a utopian wish for political rapprochement across all classes of social and political division following from agonistic democratic dialogue.

And this radical principle of liberatory de-repression, in Herbert Marcuse's terms, is what Foucault attacks as misguided. George imparts this notion of liberation through unfettered personal expression to his students, culminating in a wish-fulfillment fantasy. Expounding on the irreducible distinctions that divide the social body—what we would call the nature of identity and difference—George voices the dated and facile example of the difference between "a Negro and a Swede" (71). At once, he regrets his choice. The

narrator records George asking himself in interior monologue, “Why, oh why daren’t George say ‘between Estelle Oxford and Buddy Sorensen’?” (71). (Estelle and Buddy are two of his students, then present in the classroom.) George wonders whether “if he did dare” to use student names, instead of using impersonal identity categories, “there would be a great atomic blast of laughter, and everybody would embrace, and the kingdom of heaven would begin, right here in classroom 278. But then again, maybe it wouldn’t” (71). Here we see how George’s diatribe against liberal repression of cultural difference expresses a utopian wish for transcending these differences, which divide his students and the social body as a whole.

But George is not so un-Foucauldian as it might appear. He also deflates such a wistful fantasy, admitting how far-fetched such an outcome would be. Despite his utopian motivation, in other words, George does not believe entirely in the efficacy of his own fantasy of liberation, of transcending hierarchical social differences through democratic dialogue and free expression. Rather, George’s utopianism is balanced by his curmudgeonly anti-sentimentality, his refusal to romanticize the oppressed, or even oppression. Such a position runs the risk of political relativism (“all minorities are in competition: each one proclaims that its sufferings are the worst”). But George seeks to shock his students out of their complacency—their own pseudoliberal biases—and thus allows himself the role of gadfly. He takes up the modernist injunction to *épater le bourgeois*, typical of a character drawn from another era—the era that Huxley and Isherwood knew first hand. George’s students believe in the fantasy of liberation through the absence of discourse, the refusal to accept the darker emotions and motives of even benighted groups. His “frankness” in

admitting negative emotions, especially that of aggression (“every minority has its own aggression”), reflects George’s own aggressive impulses, as noted in his murderous fantasies. *A Single Man* thus represents the aggression of a minoritarian subject, such as George’s “murderous rage,” even prior to the recognition of the political legitimacy of this rage: the radicalized homosexual, before the moment of Stonewall and modern gay liberation, itself a violent uprising against political repression. It is in this sense that Isherwood’s novel functions as cultural weapon against American society’s oppression of homosexuals, especially during the Cold War. Dignifying the political anger of George’s murderous “Uncle George” fantasies, as we see below, the classroom lecture is a pedagogy of the oppressed to the complacent majority, a counterpoint to the queer ethics of ascetic impersonality that the novel represents.

Given this scene, therefore, it is curious how the rest of the novel champions a self-effacing mode of minoritarian subjectivity, a misfit or nonconformist style of being, distinguished by ascetic self-suspension and impersonal intersubjectivity. Rather than celebrating the minoritarian subject’s clamoring for representation and recognition, the novel usually clamors to show an alternative poetics and politics. This alternative queer model has been illegible to Isherwood’s critics as a form of agency, a mode of political subjectivity. Yet, the classroom scene prepares us for the “aggression of the minority,” and I argue that these scenes demonstrate just what such aggression, and other negative affects, might signify in a narrative economy that privileges the impersonal ethos of a self-diminishing minoritarian subject.

Rather than assuming the sovereign mode of subjectivity that George personifies in the classroom scene, he more frequently acts as a self-effacing protagonist, engaging figures to whom he is attached impersonally—his student Kenny, or Doris, his deceased partner's former lover. This alternative ethics of living in self-suspension, in modes counter to aggression and hate and other affects of political extension, informs Isherwood's queer impersonal sensibility. This sensibility is pre-Stonewall, and far from the recognizable political modes of sovereign subjectivity. This is what I consider the novel's aesthetic political agenda—its imagining of an alternative or nonconformist mode of minoritarian subjectivity, marked by affects and postures that embrace impersonal detachment and ascetic self-abstention rather than normative filiation and self-interest. *A Single Man* endorses a self-diminishing, impersonal mode of being in double exile as a minority—not fitting in with majority culture but also not finding communal belonging. This is a position far from the triumphs of Stonewall and the retroactive will-to-power of gay liberation.

I now turn to the novel to analyze more systematically key scenes that project an ascetic ideal of impersonality that is oriented to an ethics of queer relationality.

Queer Ascetic Impersonality

The following scenes track *A Single Man*'s development of queer impersonality and ascetic self-divestiture as a misfit-minority theory and practice. The classroom scene, which precedes the others, laid the theoretical groundwork in touching on the inescapable tensions haunting the social field: the inequities of minority and majority. George's lecture articulates the ordinary realities of social difference and political marginalization and gestures toward a way of reconceiving minoritarian subjectivity, thereby engaging with this

political reality in an alternative fashion. The lecture scene also employs the persistent theme of social existence as a series of performances, or as performative being—a theme introduced in the very first passage of the novel (10). Isherwood's protagonist argues against what he terms "pseudoliberal sentimentality," and what such an ideology of idealizing minorities entails for the multicultural world of Cold War Los Angeles. In short, George lectures his students regarding the negative affects and the historical intransigence of social conflict based on structural inequality.

George's classroom lecture thus prepares the reader for the following scenes, which put the theory of social marginality into practice. At the intersubjective level, this theme highlights how social position haunts interpersonal relations and thereby depicts ascetic impersonality as an ideal practice of ethical exchange. These depictions illustrate how the personal impinges on the social, how performativity and negative affects provide a model for impersonal attachments, and how to practice impersonal performativity and self-effacement in moments of recognition and reconciliation of social differences.

Yet, beyond the interpersonal domain, lies the political and cultural significance of the homosexual as victim of heteronormativity, or what George at another moment calls "the American utopia, the kingdom of the good life upon earth" (126). This is a "kingdom" "owned" by his banal neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Strunk. George bitterly reflects how they "are proud of their kingdom," one that he feels excludes him (126). In consonance with the minoritarian valence of *A Single Man* that critics focus on, the novel thus depicts moments that register George's cultural-political rage. At one point, George entertains a political fantasy of becoming a homicidal "Uncle George," in response to the

fact that a “local newspaper editor has started a campaign against sex deviates” (36).

George’s political rage is directed at this editor, his neighbors, and the heteronormative “three-quarters of the world” (40) that, symbolically, took Jim away from him. Notable for its hyperbolic—following Bersani, “ego-hyperbolizing”—aspect, George’s sadistic revenge fantasy (to “launch a campaign of systematic terror,” in his words [38]) is directed against individuals who represent the dominant power structures in society, such as a U.S. senator: “His wife may be kidnapped, garroted [sic], embalmed and sealed in the living room to await his return from the office. His children’s heads may arrive in cartons in the mail” (39). In Bersani’s terms, this mode of identity politics is keyed to hyper self-extension. George admits that his rage stems from a belief that “All are, in the last analysis, responsible for Jim’s death; their words, their thoughts, their whole way of life willed it, even though they never knew he existed” (40). Such powerful representations of George’s “minority consciousness” extend an expansive sense of cultural politics (“their whole way of life”) into the personal arena, in ways that we can appreciate as militant; these moments allow Isherwood’s critics to identify the novel with a straightforward politics of gay liberation.

Yet, in contrast, the novel gives us disciplined abdications of sovereign self-interest. Such an escape registers the queer subject’s ambivalence to fighting for a collective cause, ambivalence toward the “Uncle George” register of minoritarian political rage.²⁰ It is important, therefore, to recognize the impersonal narrator’s self-parodying tone as he ventriloquizes the “Uncle George” fantasy. In such a fantasy, the narrator ironically notes, “Jim hardly matters anymore. Jim is nothing now but an excuse for hating three quarters of the population of America” (40). The narrator continues: “What is George’s hate, then? A

stimulant, nothing more.... Rage, resentment” (40). The free-indirect style undercuts George’s incendiary homosexual “rage [and] resentment.” Now the rage is “but an excuse” and this “hate” “nothing more” than a testament to George’s “middle age,” an impersonal affect mobilized as political passion. The “middle age” qualifier (“nothing more”) ironizes George’s passionate political identity, undercutting its murderous seriousness (40).²¹

In this reading, I am more interested in the novel’s ordinary moments of escape from self-aggrandizing identitarian political claims and entailments, the latter of which surface in the self-parodying “Uncle George” fantasy. More common than such hyperbolic fantasies that align pink-baiting newspaper editors and red-baiting U.S. senators with modern totalitarian regimes such as the Khmer Rouge (36–37, 37), are moments such as George’s self-effacing refusal to go to Jim’s funeral, despite being invited by the latter’s family. Such resistance conveys George’s discipline of self-diminution: his queer, antisocial rejection of inclusion in the “sacred family grief,” as the novel sarcastically puts it (126). Indeed, George usually chooses the opposite of sovereign self-extension. He refuses the normative response, which would be to defend his self-interest, indeed his self-respect. George also enacts narcissistic self-injury and abdicates the burden of representation that defending the honor of his gay identity would entail. I like this novel because it champions an alternative ascetic ideal, the position of the misfit minority in one of its clearest articulations. In the discourse of the novel, the “minority” is a “nonconformist,” distinguished by an ethos of self-abnegation, contrary to contemporary social norms that champion self-interest and the reification of identity.

“[R]age without resentment,” “abuse without venom”

At the Starboard Side, the bar that George visits later in the novel and the place where George first set eyes on Jim, he overhears an old couple arguing drunkenly. The narrator calls their exchange “rage without resentment,” “abuse without venom” (150). Echoing George’s grammar of impersonality and negative affects, the novel here combines self-contradicting concepts. What *is* rage without resentment or abuse without venom, if not an ascetic practice of impersonal intimacy? The performative function of these roles is what renders the rage free of resentment, and the abuse devoid of venom. In this scene, the novel continues to depict a paradoxical practice of impersonal attachment—here based on performativity and distancing, entailed in the use of roleplay—one that is laced with negative affects and erotic desire. From George’s increasingly inebriated, limited point of view, the narrator describes an older couple rehearsing the vibrant impersonal script of their romance as “two nonconformists”

practicing their way of love: a mild quarrelsome alcoholism which makes it possible for them to live in a play-relationship, like children. You old bag, you old prick, you old bitch, you old bastard: rage without resentment, abuse without venom. This is how it will be for them till the end. Let’s hope they will never be parted, but die in the same hour of the same night, in their beer-stained bed. (149–50)

This perversely romantic description might bring tears to a reader’s eyes. But said reader would have to be a misfit herself, a nonconformist “unhypnotized” by the norms of pseudoliberal sentimentality (149). Such liberal social norms eschew negative intensities because they seem “abusive” and “resentful.” But these intensities are, instead, performative utterances cementing a “play-relationship” that constitutes a paradoxical

practice of love. To the conformist reader who adheres to strictly affirming models of self-sovereignty and reciprocal relationality, especially the romantic kind, there is no such thing as abuse without venom, rage without resentment. For such conformists, allowing self-diminishment, in a scene embracing insult and self-injury, is anathema to the very idea of interpersonal romance. Here, a queer ethics of impersonality triumphs—note the lack of proper names, and the lack of normative forms of expressing love—which paradoxically enables the couple to continue their romance into middle age and beyond.

This scene epitomizes Isherwood's skewering of the "sacrosanct value of selfhood," a fundamental value of liberal society. Yet, this is a value, according to Bersani's formulation, that "may account for human beings' extraordinary willingness to kill in order to protect the seriousness of their statements" (*Culture of Redemption* 4). This couple's performative interaction underscores the novel's investments in minimizing the "sacrosanct value of selfhood," here dramatized in a self-conscious "play-relationship." Indeed, George's murderous revenge fantasy stands in parodic contrast to the impersonal negativity that mediates the couple's interaction. Their rage has no resentment, their abuse no venom. Here, *A Single Man* makes a case for the importance of such perverse affective relations, which value the discomfiture of impersonal intimacy and abdicate the burden of defending the self against real or perceived narcissistic injury. Indeed, this scene perversely delights in a playful, sadomasochistic exchange of insults and equates it with a durable form of intimacy.

As we see below, *A Single Man* stages various such scenes of dynamic resistance to "pseudoliberal sentimentality," or socially normative models of individuals as sacrosanct

entities, and to relationships solely based on liberal tolerance, affirmation, and equality.

This resistance is based on the novel's argument that such sentimental norms simply hide the truths of a social reality composed of violence, aggression, injustice, and inequality.

Moreover, the novel's critique of what it terms pseudoliberal sentimentality is due to its implicit claim that hypocritical disavowal of such reality serves only to perpetuate that very same status quo. To engage with the terms of this status quo is a form of truth-telling of an impersonal sort.

As a detached observer, George here seems to champion an impersonal model of romance personified by this couple from a bygone era—they belong to the first colonists who founded the picturesque seaside town George lives in. And this model of romance is beyond Freud's pleasure principle, for the scene represents an alternative, drawn from the combination of both erotic and aggressive forces that underlie a marriage as well as other intimate relations. This reality suggests that impersonal intimacy dramatized in a sadomasochistic "play-relationship" can sustain, instead of threaten, a lifelong marriage, and even allow the spouses to maintain a "childlike" innocence beyond middle age. Even alcoholism ("mild quarrelsome alcoholism," "beer-stained bed") is valorized in this impersonal attachment, this mutual, performative abnegation of personal sanctity. Their bad romance runs counter to a sentimental vision of social hygiene that disavows the possibility of a "beer-stained bed" without alcoholism—eschewing the stigma of addiction—or of lovers projecting rage without resentment, or abuse without venom.

“Because the dialogue is by its nature impersonal”

Perhaps the most important scene of impersonal ascetic relationality involves Kenny Potter’s entry into George’s drunken world. This moment dedicates itself quite openly to a celebration of the value of a queer impersonal dynamic sustaining a self-abnegating, detached intimacy. The tenor of George and Kenny’s exchange is pining for a bygone era when, in Kenny’s words, “you could call your father sir” (159). In the discourse of the novel, such a desire reads as the longing for a formal mode of attachment. George recognizes Kenny’s desire for a hierarchical structure between them, given their respective power imbalance and age difference. After Kenny longs to be living in a time “when you could call your father sir,” George warns Kenny that he will soon forget this. Kenny submissively agrees: “Well if you say so—okay.” George: “Okay, sir.” Kenny: “Okay, sir!” Kenny “beams” with “pleasure” (159). Such dialogue entails a mode of relating between impersonal, formally hierarchical categories of social identity, such as, in the case of Kenny and George, Youth versus Age (154). The novel implicitly advocates misfit or “nonconformist” social and affective intimacies that such hierarchical relations can afford for both minority and, perhaps, majority subject positions. As with the practice of nonconformist intimacy expressed as rage without resentment, here we have another form of self-dispossession that constitutes libidinal, yet formal, ethical contact.

A Single Man suggests that there is a salutary function in an ethos of embracing social polarization in order to achieve impersonal intimacy, a form unavailable to politically over-determined modes of exchange. George notes that in this type of “symbolic dialogue,” “what really matters is not what you talk about, but the being together in this particular

relationship” (154). The content of the conversation is not as important as the formal relationship being forged—one that lets interlocutors “talk about anything and change the subject as often as [they] like” (154). Implicit in this line of thinking is the fact that seldom do individuals stratified and polarized by social hierarchies engage in dialogue at all, so beholden are they to individual and collective self-interests, especially vis-à-vis the burdens of sustaining them in the face of the other.

George advocates this queer paradigm of impersonal intimacy achieved through detached attachment, as we see in George’s observation of the couple, and qualified de-individuation, which enables personal engagement with impersonal otherness. For instance, George insists that the symbolic dialogue only works if both “[y]ou and your dialogue-partner [are] somehow opposites” (154). This type of formal interaction is based on depersonalization (Kenny calls him “sir” rather than “George”). Suspending one’s individuality thus fosters a queerly impersonal attachment, laced with erotic energy, as this scene makes clear. The novel’s psycho-narration builds a defense of George’s ascetic ideal of queer impersonality, which, in addition to entailing denial of individuality and self-investment, also entails unself-interested attachment to one’s social (or “symbolic”) identity.

Why do the partners have to be opposites? the novel’s narrator asks, focalizing George’s drunken interior monologue: “Because you have to be symbolic figures—like, in this case, Youth and Age. Why do you have to be symbolic? Because the dialogue is by its nature impersonal. . . . It doesn’t involve either party personally” (155). At this moment in the novel, the doctrine of impersonality is rhetorically reinforced as precisely a doctrine of

asceticism, or an aesthetics of existence. George argues that one must rely on an impersonal relationship to one's own symbolic identity in order to dialogue across reciprocal yet polarized lines—here, generational, but also national. Ironically, the purpose is not to identify, but to disidentify: to see across the divide, and not to reify that division, as with normatively minoritarian injunctions of self-advocacy and self-representation. The self is suspended in an “abstract” or impersonal intimacy of polar opposites as dialogic equals—an ethical experiment in impersonal intersubjectivity, in the name of an ascetic ideal of lateral self-extension through de-individuation. Such lateral asceticism momentarily suspends the burden of selfhood and its possessive political entailments.

Among the queer desires George evinces in his intimacy with Kenny is the desire for impersonal mutuality, in which the self is depersonalized and divested, replaced by the ironic performance of a hierarchical role—as the nostalgia for “sir” makes clear. More importantly, such abstract encounters stage the desire to play with social identity in a drama of power exchange. As we have seen, George resists espousing the “pseudoliberal sentiment” of denying social differences in the name of civic equality. In fact, he perversely urges the opposite, the performative intensification of differences as a nonnormative or queer ethical principle for negotiating a salient interaction. But this identification is nonpossessive, and nonadversarial: or, in the novel's parlance, without resentment and without venom. The recognition is an effort to bridge across identitarian divisions, rather than emphasizing them as a political form of self-extension. The scene's sadomasochistic energy lends this queer relation an added frisson, which could be claimed as antithetical to a

visibility ethos of gay liberation, as George flirts with his student but they never openly address the erotic undertow of their exchanges.

This queer model of interpersonal discourse, as with the couple engaging in a paradoxical, impersonal intimacy, depends on embracing socially determined identities as a performance, a (role) play, and not as one's "self." That self is too "personal" to be of use in this meeting of cultural personae. Developing an impersonal ascetic ideal of relationality suggests that playing with power differentials and symbolic identities is one form of potentially transforming one's relation to oneself, as well as to the other, by performing a script as social actors embedded in a hierarchical social world. This queer ethical alternative contrasts a possessive form of political identification, one the novel satirizes in the genocidal fantasies of "Uncle George."²² The novel stages George's misfit minoritarian subjectivity in impersonal encounters rich in affective and libidinal intensities.²³

"[C]ognizing darkly": The Spiritual Ascetic Ideal

Having seen the ways in which the novel stages ascetic flights from possessive selfhood and identitarian political attachments, it is ironic how, in the words of Mark Lilly, *A Single Man* is easily considered "one of the very earliest novels to give an emphatically positive face to the gay experience."²⁴ How "emphatically positive" is Isherwood's novel? And yet, Isherwood's Berlin novels depicted homosexuality at one remove, whereas *A Single Man* is single-mindedly dedicated to its portrayal. As we have seen, this focus on male homosexual experience before the Stonewall Riots and the modern gay liberation movement makes Isherwood a standard bearer for this cause.

A Single Man, however, while refusing to recapitulate phobic narratives of tragic homosexuality, also ends with George's death. Elizabeth Hardwick, in a contemporary review, deems the novel "a sad book, with a biological melancholy running through it, a sense of relentless reduction, daily diminishment" (4). What Hardwick conceives as *A Single Man*'s "biological melancholy" is another name for its representation of a self-abnegating impersonal ascetic ideal. She notices the novel's persistent strain of melancholy—calling it "biological" is a way of indicating how fundamental and definitive is Isherwood's thematic treatment of ascetic impersonality. Its integral nature to Isherwood's novel is the key to Hardwick's implication that a novel could conceivably entertain a "biological melancholy" as well as a "sense of relentless reduction" and "daily diminishment." This narrative is motivated by an ascetic ideal of "daily" self-"diminishment" and impersonal relationality.

And yet, these elements of the novel coexist with the positive "vitality" that Garnes and other critics praise: "I am alive, [George] says to himself, I am alive!" (104; original emphasis). The narrator continues: "And life-energy surges hotly through him, and delight, and appetite. How good to be in a body—even this old beat-up carcass—that still has warm blood and live semen and rich marrow and wholesome flesh!" (104). This passage culminates a triumphant moment, which occurs right after George visits Doris in the hospital. After his brief and awkward hospital visit, George is sure that Doris is not long for this world. And he feels "proud," "glad," and "indecently gleeful" to be "be counted in ... the ranks of that marvelous minority, The Living" (103). Isherwood's emphasis on the vitality of the body is, at a superficial level, the celebration of "The Living" over the dead:

George is ecstatic for being alive even as Jim is dead, and his former rival nearly so. At this moment, George experiences the survivor's euphoria at life's triumphing over death, regardless of what this means emotionally for him: being *A Single Man* graying in L.A. This brief exultation in vitality, in contrast to the sense of ascetic "diminishment" in the rest of the novel, invigorates George's sense of his own body, and, by extension, because George can serve a minoritizing function, rehabilitates the politics of male homosexual embodiment, as vital rather than moribund.

But it is important to attend to the ways in which *A Single Man* sustains its "biological melancholy," its ascetic sensibility and impersonal mode of inter- and self-subjectivity. The novel centers on a grieving gay widower and, a few hours later, returns to a darker sense of the body as inert, the living dead, or even as a corpse. And, even when his body is joyfully alive, George describes it as "an old, beat-up carcass," foregrounding another instance of the novel's many scenes of George's "relentless reduction" and "daily diminishment," which qualify this momentary vitality and revisit *A Single Man's* ascetic ideal.

Compare this moment to the penultimate scene in the novel. Now, George is asleep, and the significance of his body is indeed less "vital," more "diminished": "[H]ere we have this body known as George's body, asleep on this bed and snoring quite loud.... Jim used to kick it awake, turn it over on its side.... But *is* all of George altogether present here?" (183). This moment suggests the novel's ascetic evacuation of George's self-consciousness, a total escape from self. This description also represents the de-vitalization of George's body. As it lies in mindless slumber, the narrator transcends the limited third-

person point of view, speaking as if watching George's body from above. And the narrator adopts this quasi-omniscient perspective to raise a number of existential questions, beginning with "But is all of George altogether present here?" Such a metaphysical questioning of the significance of the body "cognizing darkly" signals that the body is reduced to being an appurtenance to a dissociated consciousness (181). While George sleeps, his body might be there, but his consciousness, and therefore the "personal" part of him, his soul, might not be. As such, the narrator refers to George as a mere body, formally reduced to an object devoid of personal significance: "The body on the bed is still snoring"; "Jim used to kick it awake, turn it over on its side" (185, 183). George is now reduced further, to an impersonal object, notably lacking the dignity of personhood altogether.

Hence, the last scene in the novel depicts a reduction of George's body to being just a "body on the bed"—an "it" that can be kicked or, more ominously, a "vehicle" that can malfunction (184, 185). This final section of *A Single Man* portrays how the individual consciousness itself is a "nonentity" (186). And, by extension, the significance of being alive is similarly diminished. After posing the existential question—*Is all of George present while his body sleeps?*—the narrator contemplates the multiplicity of entities in the world. He uses the metaphor of rock pools, which are found a few miles north up the coast from George's house.

By so doing, the novel sets up the gradual diminishment of individual consciousness, after calling into question the significance of the corporeal form without a conscious agent.

Each pool is separate and different, and you can, if you are fanciful, give them names, such as George, Charlotte, Kenny, Mrs. Strunk. Just as George and the

others are thought of, for convenience, as individual entities, so you may think of a rock pool as an entity; though, of course, it is not.... And, just as the waters of the ocean come flooding, darkening over the pools, so over George and the others in sleep come the waters of that other ocean—that consciousness which is no one in particular but which contains everyone and everything, past, present and future, and extends unbroken beyond the uttermost stars. (183–84)

This, the penultimate passage in the novel, stages the de-creation of George, rendering him a “nonentity.” Whereas he (and the other characters) were hitherto seen as “individual entities,” now their most personal affective experiences—“hunted anxieties, grim-jawed greeds, dartingly vivid intuitions” (183)—are rendered indistinguishable, drowned by the ocean, which is “that consciousness which is no one in particular but which contains everyone and everything.” Seen from the inhuman perspective of the cosmic ocean, the narrator here subsumes the personal and the individual into an impersonal entity, the ocean that “comes ... flooding, darkening over the pools.” The narrator considers individual consciousness a “fanciful” and “convenient” fiction. As the waters of the pool become one with the waters of the ocean, George’s consciousness leaves his body and is submerged in that impersonal entity. The transcendent unity within multiplicity, or unity that dissolves multiplicity, comprises “everyone and everything,” and effaces the singularity and significance of anyone or anything.

This dispassionate discourse is in marked contrast with the romantic cult of the body that George experiences after visiting Doris or swimming on the beach at night with Kenny (161–164). How far the novel has come from George’s exultation in his body for being rudely alive (“How good to be in a body ... that still has warm blood and live semen and rich marrow and wholesome flesh!”). The reason for this spiritual turn is the persistence of the ascetic ideal of impersonality in the narrative. This turn coincides with

George's sleep, and signals the novel's turn away from matters of the body, individual desire, and social embeddedness to matters of the spirit. George's vitality is represented chiefly as a celebration of his sexual vitality ("live semen," "wholesome flesh"). And it is this vitality that is now subsumed, de-created, within an impersonal cosmic entity. The body is living on borrowed time, and borrowed energy, and at any moment will give way to the quintessence of all things, which also entails any given individual's death.

Indeed, the conclusion to the novel strongly intimates George's death:

[I]f some part of the nonentity we called George has indeed been absent at this moment ... away out there on the deep waters, then it will return to find itself homeless. For it can associate no longer with what lies here, unsnoring, on the bed. This is now cousin to the garbage in the container on the back porch. Both will have to be carted away and disposed of, before too long. (185)

Passages such as these are informed by Isherwood's intensive identification with a Western Vedantic spirituality of transcending the self, the unity of the singular, and the interconnection of every living thing in a universe composed of one form of energy, one God.²⁵ What I would add is that this spiritual conception of reality de-centers and dissolves the individual, representing the impersonal ascetic ideal in extremis. See, for instance, how the narrator compares George's body to "garbage." Hence, our protagonist is now reduced to a mere "nonentity" in the grand scheme of things. Furthermore, the use of deixis and demonstrative pronouns ("this moment," "what lies here," "[t]his") suggests an immediacy to the now-objective narration, as the narrator and reader enjoy a bird's eye view of George's body as it lies, "unsnoring, on the bed," a description and position that suggest the body's lifelessness; the body is now no longer vital; it is a corpse, "cousin" to mere refuse.

What is more, this passage, the ending of the novel, raises the question of whether George is truly a corpse, or simply makes a transcendent spiritual claim for the metaphysical status of all bodies as impersonal “nonentities.” The locution “the nonentity we called George” further renders him corpse-like, especially in its use of the past tense: what was George is now gone, replaced by a “nonentity,” a probably dead body on a bed. And so, the notion that George is a nonentity is ambiguous: was he always a nonentity, as the previously cited passage suggests (“you can, if you are fanciful, give them names, such as George”)? Are individuals nonentities to begin with, whether asleep or awake, alive or dead? Or does this conclusion to the novel suggest on the contrary that the “nonentity we called George” was a vital consciousness, the essence of which will be “homeless” once his body dies?

It seems to me that the novel is trying to have it both ways. George is a nonentity at the end of his narrative arc, but a vital embodiment of individual yearnings and consciousness, regardless of the “old beat-up carcass” it is housed in, in the middle of the narrative. Other scenes in the novel convey a similar dissociation of body and consciousness as the last scene, elevating the metaphysical and reducing the physical: the scene of George driving effects an impersonal division of labor, wherein his mind is free to think about important issues, emotional and existential concerns, while his body is a mere servant, subserviently maneuvering the vehicle. By the end of the novel, the body is itself a vehicle, and the spirit or mind—what the narrator consistently calls “consciousness”—is what solely renders individuals unique. Then, by a final turn, precisely what renders individual

persons unique—their consciousness—is relegated to the unreal status of fiction. What matters in the end is the spiritual over the personal. After me comes the flood.

Conclusion: Ascetically, Impersonally Queer

To be clear, I am arguing that Isherwood's *A Single Man* anticipates, and also critiques, what we now understand to be the cultural logic of identity, well before Stonewall and other triumphs of minoritarian collective actions and the social transformations of the 1960s and 1970s. My argument is that the novel represents Isherwood's considered and consistent alternative to the politics of identity, what I call the misfit-minority position. In this vein, the misfit minority—or the “minority-sister” “nonconformist” of the novel—operates in qualified resistance to grandiose self-possessive projects, an ascetic ideal of queer impersonality that is legible to us from our contemporary vantage point. Ultimately, Isherwood resisted the call to write himself into what David Garnes terms the “pantheon of modern gay literature” (201). *A Single Man* conveys a contrary tendency away from prescriptive and restrictive claims of political identity, projecting instead a nonconformist minoritarian model of ascesis, depicting modes of self-divestiture and what I consider Isherwood's quintessential queer ethos of impersonal attachment, which perhaps defines his contribution to Anglophone letters and queers everywhere. In this sense, to call Isherwood a proleptic advocate for an identitarian politics of gay visibility in *A Single Man* is to miss his proleptic aesthetic demurral from such prescriptive and restrictive models of relationality and subjectivity. Isherwood deconstructs the very subject he reconstructs, in a literary novel that is politically resonant in a contrary sense to the politics of gay identity he is most known for now.

Isherwood's novel thus represents a particularly resonant, nonconformist minoritarian subjectivity that survived two World Wars, expatriation and self-imposed exile, and the multicultural American century. From his wide experience with transnational homosexual politics in the 1930s, Isherwood wrote the modernist impersonality into *A Single Man*, one that engages in flights from liberal norms of minoritarian identity. These are social and affective norms that the novel suspends, and that serve as a now-familiar critique of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called our own supposedly post-AIDS Era and "the strategic banalization of gay and lesbian politics" (13). In our time, I think we ought to consider the lateral agency of Isherwood's queer "minority-sister" as a response to the "slow death" that marginalized subjects bear and represent, as Berlant claims.²⁶ We might view the scenes of ascetic enjoyment in a diminished sense of self, as well as the enjoyment of playing impersonal roles within sadomasochistic intensities, as forms of "slow life," or impersonally queer lives. Minoritarian subjects can impersonally enjoy suspending the burden of selfhood, of sovereign agency, and even entertain transcending the claims of the social—if interpellated as the call to aggressive action and violence—altogether.

NOTES

¹ Summers adds, however, that these issues are “balanced and qualified by a transcendent religious vision” sustained by Isherwood’s forty-year investment in spiritual asceticism, grounded in Vedanta Hinduism (xiii). Many of the concepts at work in this essay—asceticism, detachment, divestment of the ego—are concepts shared with the belief system and ritual tradition of Vedanta. Isherwood was a faithful disciple of Vedanta, studying under Swami Prabhavananda (and initially intending to become a monk) in the Pasadena-based Vedanta Society of Southern California, part of the Ramakrishna Order in India. This Western version of Vedanta, which was introduced to Isherwood by his friend, noted intellectual and spiritual confidant Gerald Heard, promulgated the essential insignificance of the self and the essential equivalence of all living things. Isherwood describes Heard’s and Prabhavananda’s influence on him (referring to himself in the third person, which is a signature of his style) in this fashion: “As the result of his talks with Gerald [Heard] and Gerald’s friend and teacher, the Hindu monk Prabhavananda, Christopher found himself able to believe—as a possibility, at least—that an eternal impersonal presence (call it ‘the soul’ if you like) exists within all creatures and is other than the mutable non-eternal ‘person’” (*Christopher and His Kind* 305–06). However, I believe that Isherwood’s allegiance to an impersonal ascetic ideal precedes and indeed fortifies his post-emigration dedication to Vedanta ritual and religious practice. For more on Isherwood’s spiritual dimension, see *My Guru and His Disciple*.

² Georg Simmel theorized the social “type” of the “stranger,” a sociological concept that describes individuals who mediate between social worlds given their own position as relative outsiders. The cosmopolitan stranger that Isherwood best represents in the early fiction is his eponymous narrator, named William Bradshaw, in “The Last of Mr. Norris” and Christopher Isherwood in “Goodbye to Berlin,” respectively. In both cases, the impersonal and detached observations of Isherwood’s reserved English narrator illustrate the insight a “stranger” has while looking into the maelstrom of political and cultural changes taking place in a foreign society, such as Isherwood with regard to Berlin in the Weimar Era. According to Simmel, the stranger can view his social surroundings “objectively” because “he is not bound by roots to the particular constituents and partisan dispositions of the group” (145). Isherwood’s allegiance to an aesthetic doctrine of impersonality and ego-divesting ascetic ideal underscores the virtues of the stranger as privileged yet reserved social observer—his famous “I am a Camera” in the Berlin writings and, I will argue, beyond.

³ In the typescript “First Draft” to *Christopher and His Kind*, for example, Isherwood calls E. M. Forster “a great chieftain” of the homosexual “tribe” (55). As other critics can attest, the “tribe” concept is key to Isherwood’s worldview of homosexuality as an oppressed cultural identity or “minority,” on par with socioeconomic class, since his earliest days in Berlin. The difference between “tribe” and “kind,” however, is subtle: “kind” entails a solidarity with other minority groups, as *A Single Man* makes clear in the classroom scene.

Thus, even in *Christopher and His Kind*, usually taken to be his gay manifesto, Isherwood argues for cross-identitarian (or minoritarian) solidarity. For a different reading on the “tribe” versus “kind” distinction, see Jamie Carr (2). While Carr also argues that Isherwood “resists essentialized categories of identification” (2), her larger argument is about the anti-linear and anti-progressive sense of “queer temporality” represented in Isherwood’s writings.

⁴ Tim Dean’s queer Lacanian work draws on modernist impersonality and a conception of the unconscious as the otherness within. See, for instance, his “T. S. Eliot, Famous Clairvoyante,” where he elaborates a notion of the modernist poet as a medium for alien forces and voices, thereby evacuating the self. Dean thus draws out the queer implications of Eliot’s modernist doctrine of impersonality. For other takes on modernist impersonality, see the now-classic Maud Ellman and the recent Sharon Cameron.

⁵ In *Christopher and His Kind*, see, for instance, Isherwood’s reliance on the third-person “Christopher” or even “Isherwood” when speaking of his past selves, which grammatically insists on the impersonal distance between the authorial persona and its past instantiations, present even in the memoir. You could say that in *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood mobilizes impersonal form on behalf of the politics of identity, a “frank” ideological stance missing in the “purer” fictional narratives, which eschew the entailments of identitarian political representation in favor of impersonality keyed to a self-divesting ascetic ideal.

⁶ Marianne DeKoven, in “Psychoanalysis and Sixties Utopianism,” argues that the 1960s in the U.S. stretched into the 1970s—what she calls “the long sixties” (263).

⁷ It is this “representative” function of the novel that most politically engaged critics formulate as *A Single Man*’s significance, insofar as the novel represents the individual experience of a homosexual as a political experience of alienation and marginalization, rather than the experience of individual pathology, as homosexuality was normatively considered at the time. Homosexuality was famously depathologized in 1973 by the American Psychiatric Association when the board of directors decided to remove it from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). See the Robert Spitzer’s statement for the APA, “Homosexuality and Civil Rights Position Statement,” for a concurrent resolution regarding homosexual discrimination as a civil rights issue. Not coincidentally, Dr. Evelyn Hooker conducted groundbreaking research proving the equivalence between hetero and homo individuals in terms of their relative sense of adjustment to society and their life experiences; her work helped to show that homosexuals could be happy and well-adjusted individuals. Hooker, based in California, was a friend of Isherwood’s. Though he steadfastly refused to become a subject of her research, as chronicled in early drafts of *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood was of course in favor of her work and its de-stigmatizing of homosexuality. (For more on Hooker, see, for instance, her article Evelyn Hooker, “The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual.”) Isherwood’s novella is rightfully at the vanguard of anti-homophobic politics, but the political subjectivity and ethics of relationality Isherwood develops in *A Single Man* are more complex, as my argument demonstrates.

⁸ I am using the term “queer” in the strategically nonspecific sense of forms of being and

belonging that are opposed to all regimes of normativity, as articulated by Michael Warner in the introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Warner writes against the “dominant concept” of “gay and lesbian community” as “a notion generated in the tactics of Anglo-American identity politics and its liberal-national environment”: “in the liberal-pluralist frame [the notion of lesbian and gay community] predisposes that political demands will be treated as demands for the toleration and representation of a minority constituency” (xxxv–xxxvi). Isherwood’s novella resists this “reduction,” in Warner’s terms, of the political model of sexual dissidence to a community model of discrete identities under a liberal umbrella. Indeed, *A Single Man* criticizes what it calls the “pseudoliberal sentimentality” of “tolerance,” which the novel considers merely a tacit form of annihilation through social ghettoization. At the same time, the famous diction of “minority-sister” in the classroom scene is in tension with this queer impersonal and ascetic ideal.

⁹ I use the term “non-fictional autobiography” to stress the generic ambiguity of texts like *Lions and Shadows*. As Isherwood reminds us in his “Note to the reader,” that book “is not, in the ordinary journalistic sense of the word, an autobiography ... it is not even entirely ‘true’ ” (7). Thus, Isherwood presents *Lions and Shadows* as a curious mixture of fiction and autobiography, a fictionalized, if not wholly fictional, autobiography, in contrast to the scrupulous “journalistic” adherence to facts—especially regarding his sexuality—that characterizes his later *Christopher and His Kind*. The latter thus stands as a political correction of the former.

¹⁰ As I do, Joseph Bristow argues that *A Single Man* does not anticipate gay liberation, but rather is continuous with Isherwood’s earlier novels, which in Isherwood’s and many critics’ eyes “tactfull[ly] silenc[ed] his [narrators’] gayness” (147). I agree that the novel “extends Isherwood’s sustained interest in representing homosexuality in some of his earlier novels” (Bristow 147). Yet, Bristow’s larger argument regards Isherwood’s writings as primarily “backward-looking,” which sidesteps Isherwood’s evolution as a politically aware writer constantly adapting to his time and place (World War in Europe and the Pacific, the Cold War, Weimar Germany, Los Angeles). It is just that Isherwood resisted the normative claims of politics, especially if these stigmatized homosexuality, but even especially if these claims threatened to usurp the relative autonomy of literary practice. Isherwood belonged to what he termed the “cult of the Artist,” or the modernist cult of aesthetic autonomy. See, for instance, Isherwood’s “Unused Chapter” to *Christopher and His Kind*: He writes that “the artist stands alone” (13); and: “It was Edward Upward who had read Baudelaire to Christopher and who had initiated him into the cult of the Artist” (13). In fact, I argue against Bristow that *A Single Man* is a modernist, pre-gay liberation or impersonally queer work, whereas the non-fictional *Christopher and His Kind* documents Isherwood’s direct advocacy for gay liberation.

¹¹ In 1974, Isherwood famously gave an MLA address on homosexuality and literature. See Berg 9–10.

¹² See especially, in *Intimacies*, Bersani’s “Shame On You” 31–56 and “The Power of Love and the Power of Evil” 57–88.

¹³ Pace Bersani, whose analysis of contemporary queer ascetic self-divestiture focuses on

unsafe sex between men (or barebacking), *A Single Man* is devoid of gay sex. While George masturbates in the penultimate scene of the novel—before his presumable death—the remainder of the narrative is oddly chaste. There are several scenes of George’s homoerotic appreciation for male bodies, for example, but none that dramatize these bodies getting it on. Isherwood’s ascetic ideal is thus evident in the novel’s subtle treatment of erotic desire. This ascetic ideal arguably explains the narrative’s sublimation of sexual desires and elevation of nonsexual desires for detached or impersonal attachment.

¹⁴ This is how Bersani famously formulates it in “Is the Rectum a Grave?” for instance.

¹⁵ I have many concerns with minimizing the specificities and entailments of identity, disenfranchisement, and histories of oppression that a queer theory of impersonality and ascetic self-vaporization, such as Bersani’s, raise. For a sensitive treatment of the double burden of a queer, though not yet “gay,” aesthetic subjectivity, see Heather Love’s chapter on Walter Pater in *Feeling Backward*.

¹⁶ The use of the term “vacation” might be emblematic of the bourgeois privilege attending such scenes of lateral agency. But I think misfit minorities also practice escaping the burden of self through ostensibly “lateral” means.

¹⁷ I borrow the term “aesthetics of existence” from the second and third volumes of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, where the philosopher’s study of eroticism in the West became a study not of systematic control over subjects and populations, but about ancient self-fashioning and an ethics of care of the self (*The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*).

¹⁸ In the 1930s, Isherwood termed British society and its liberal governance a “British heterosexual dictatorship” (Unused Chapter of *Christopher and His Kind*, 5). In the same section, Isherwood scorns the “so-called democracies” of the West, whom he saw in the 1930s as no better than the totalitarian states of Germany and Russian Soviets. He writes: “Only the anarchists of Spain would seem to have affirmed the homosexual’s right to live” (9).

¹⁹ George sides with something called the majority and speaks of minorities as the other in condescending and reductive terms (71–72). Note his use of the pronoun “we” to refer to an imagined majority (“Minorities are people ... like us.... It’s better if we admit to disliking and hating them...” [71]).

²⁰ In *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai calls anger one of the grand, “classical political passions” (5).

²¹ As we will see with the old married couple, the words “rage” and “resentment” reappear later in the novel, transformed by a perversely romantic discourse of impersonal attachment mediated by performative insult.

²² Engaging in such symbolic exchanges allow for impersonal understanding, without the sugar-coating or “bland annihilation” that Mrs. Strunk practices with George (27–29). Her “incurious” tolerance betrays a resistance to engage with George as an other. But beyond allowing the dialogue to take place, the impersonality of playing a social role self-consciously adds a safeguard. One cannot take personally the enactment of a social role; rather, the responsibility now belongs to society for structuring itself along these differential lines to begin with. One’s personal culpability fades as the determinism of social roles comes

into sharper focus; abdicating burdensome attachment to one's cultural self pays dividends in demonstrating the entailments of identity formation outside an individual purview.

²³ These are very retrograde desires represented here: wanting a more impersonal, more hierarchical, relationship. Yet, George reaches a rapprochement across social divides. By so doing, he ensures that the novel refuses to ignore these divisions (as "pseudoliberals" would) or to relegate them to the collective level of political rage (with resentment, as in the politics of identity). The novel offers escape from the liberal tenet of sovereign agency and the rhetoric of identity. In what I read as misfit minoritarian poetics and politics, the novel stages scenes of self-attenuation, affective and libidinal negativity, antisocial detachment, and impersonal relationality as paradoxical intimacies.

²⁴ Lilly continues: "The tradition of social realism [in] coming out novels ... is indebted to the work of Isherwood." In *Gay Men's Literature in the Twentieth Century* (189), also quoted by David Garnes (201).

²⁵ Much of my analysis of *A Single Man's* Western Vedic spirituality is based on Isherwood's spiritual autobiography, *My Guru and His Disciple*. The critical consensus is summarized by Bucknell and Summers. For a contemporary perspective on Isherwood's Western appropriation of the Vedic religion, see also S. Nagarajan. For a highly unsympathetic account of Isherwood's Western appropriation of Vedanta, see Niladri Chatterjee.

²⁶ By "slow death," Berlant indicates an ongoing ordinary experience that "refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence" (754). Berlant's focus on "death" is dramatically political, in order to demonstrate that the "general emphasis of the phrase ['slow death'] is on the phenomenon of mass physical attenuation under global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality" (754). One could say that my focus is on "slow life," or the less-dramatically inflected phenomenon of ongoing physical and social experiences of marginalization, lack of access to the good life, yet perseverance through affective and social, not to mention aesthetic, means such as ritualized religion, literary and cultural invention and consumption, and so on. To call such ongoing experiences of limited pleasure, limited transcendence of social and political marginalization "slow death" is in some ways to minimize the creative potential for any individual or "population," to use Berlant's term, to enact resistance, however fleeting or weak, to regimes of domination. For a different conception of nonsovereign or "suspended" agency, see Sianne Ngai. For a classic example of the possibility of cultural vibrancy despite systematic oppression, see Patterson on African American antebellum cultures under slavery, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Like Berlant's emphasis on "slow death," Patterson's focus on "social death" takes into account the potential for limited agency among the oppressed despite such morbidly repressive conditions. Such agency bespeaks a form of optimism that might qualify as "cruel," in Berlant's terms. However, such optimism can also be read as a mode of affirmation. See Michael Snediker for more on queer optimism. Also cf. Heather Love for a touching reminder of the importance of attending to negative affects and queer structures of feeling.

CHAPTER 4

Ishiguro's Imaginary Geographies:

Spatial Grammar and the Political Allegory of *Never Let Me Go*

Hailsham is like a physical manifestation of what we have to do to all children.... It is a protected world.¹

The big thing about *Never Let Me Go* is that they never rebel.²

—Kazuo Ishiguro

Introduction

Never Let Me Go is the story of an oppressed group that does not rebel.³ The narrator, Kathy H., and her best friends, Tommy D. and Ruth, are orphans who grow up in an isolated and privileged English boarding school, Hailsham, in a setting described in the epigraph as “England, late 1990s.” This epigraph frames the story as a counterfactual futuristic history, or a story that takes place in an alternate version of our world, not too long ago, but in a society much more advanced than our own. “England, late 1990s” signals the novel’s odd temporality, which frames the central political issues that I take up: the benighted status of oppressed minority groups, and their limited capacity for agency, autonomy, and resistance against this oppression. The story belongs to a possible future, the not-yet of science fiction. And yet, the novel takes some time to reveal what makes it science-fictional, if not a “proper” science fiction: the “students,” as they are called, belong to a class of post-human clones, genetically created as repositories of vital organs, which are systematically harvested when the clones come of age, after a brief time spent being “carers”

for other “donors.” Donors are forced to “donate” their vital organs until they “complete,” or die, after the fourth donation, some time in their early to mid-thirties, if not earlier.

Indeed, the novel’s epigraph functions as foreshadowing, and encapsulates my main argument in this chapter: the setting of the narrative, “England, late 1990s,” signals the sense of fatalism that pervades this narrative of non-resistance. For, “England, late 1990s” means that the story is already in the past. It, therefore, cannot be changed in the present time, the time of the reader (and, we will see, the present time of the narrator, whose tale is a complex tissue of recollections, retroversions, and anticipations). The novel’s weird (and wayward) temporality is thus prefigured in the epigraph, whose jetlag in relation to the narrative as a whole, represents the central theme of Ishiguro’s novel: social acquiescence toward historical actuality or the way things are, a temporal logic of defeat before resistance is even countenanced. There is never any question of rebellion, and the counterfactual frame prefigures this finality to the proceedings. Moreover, the setting is counterfactual in more than the obvious way. Not only is this “England, late 1990s” wholly imaginary, a dystopia where the organ donation system propagates a macabre welfare state. Critic Shameem Black, among others, likens the social subordination of the clones to twentieth-century regimes of “modern totalitarian repression,” and the organ donation system to eugenic genocide.⁴ In Agambian terms, the bare lives of the clones are social forms of bare life, genetically manufactured and disposed of in a grotesque liberal version of modern totalitarianism.⁵

What distinguishes Ishiguro’s narrative, what makes it new and compelling, is the fact that the students, in the novel’s euphemistic parlance, never seem to question their

fate. No Promethean revolution is even imagined, much less planned, or set into action, evoking discomfort in some readers and sympathy in many others.⁶ The novel scrambles the narrative arc of critical dystopian science fiction, what Amit Marcus calls the “common literary pattern [of] prohibition—violation—punishment,” frustrating generic expectations of heroic rebellion against oppressive authority.⁷ Such rebellion typically serves to confirm the aggrandized agency of the protagonists and the potential for political transformation in a critical dystopia.⁸ In a sense, the novel presents generic as well as existential quandaries for reader and critic alike: if not a critical dystopia, how do we classify it? As with other Ishiguro novels, *NLMG* blurs generic distinctions even as it adopts some conventions of speculative fiction. It is for this reason that, while it belies such commonplaces as the emergence of resistance from below in a dystopian world, the novel nonetheless invites affectively invested responses that seem to belie its refusal to paint resistance by the book. The narrative seems to invite our desire for the redemption of human agency through resistance to social oppression, only to foreclose this ingrained conventional expectation. By violating what Marcus calls the “common literary pattern,” Ishiguro’s novel invites interest and creates an anomalous situation where resistance is not only futile, but resides solely in the imagination of the intended reader. While there is plenty of prohibition, including the various strictures against smoking (67–69), there is little talk of violation, and thus little need for punishment. Instead, we have the passivity of victims who understand their fate but do little to change it.

By breaking the literary pattern endemic to critical dystopia (consider the recent film *The Island* as a more typical treatment of clones; there, they rebel), Ishiguro invites

questions regarding the human status of these “students.”⁹ As one of the novel’s readers, Cortland Campau, states in a discussion thread entitled “Why didn’t anyone consider leaving?”, such lack of rebellion is “not a true depiction of human nature. Someone *always* rebels” (Post 4).¹⁰ Yet, another commenter, Traveler, complicates this Promethean view of “human nature” with a rhetorical question: “If rebellion is truly a part of human nature (and I’m not sure that’s true), does the fact that the clones don’t try to rebel imply that they are in fact less than human?” (Post 5). The parenthetical caveat lies at the heart of the story: What, precisely, is human nature, if the clones’ nature is depicted as non-heroic, non-rebellious, and utterly conformist?

The “Traveler” commenter gestures toward an answer to this existential question by glossing over some of the novel’s plot points. Traveler points out that the students do rebel, but only on a small scale, reminding us that Kathy and Tommy petition for a deferral from the organ donations. Traveler notes that such purposeful action, while limited (a deferral would only last three to four years [153]) is nonetheless “the type of rebellious behavior most of us engage in during our lives” (Post 5). Traveler then ends the post with another rhetorical question, asking whether our notion of human agency is self-aggrandizing and deluded: “Do we really rebel, or do we fool ourselves, as the characters do, into thinking we are rebelling, and thus satisfy some psychological need?” (Ibid). Indeed, Ishiguro’s novel seems to invite such existential questions, turning a mirror to the reader by foreclosing the students’ resistance to certain death. This discussion thread, not coincidentally, is the most commented-on in the forum for the novel on Amazon.com (48 posts, by far the most popular topic). The topic’s popularity illustrates how the story

touches on a universal theme, the human capacity for resistance, and the likelihood of resisting oppressive conditions in a world constituted by these conditions. Some critics, as Campau notes, use this lack of resistance to inform their reading that the clones are less than human. They lack the fire of Prometheus, genetically designed to prevent such revolutionary autonomy, to better conform to their sacrificial role. Other readers, like Traveler, from the same evidence, come to the opposite conclusion: that their lack of resistance illustrates humankind's only modest capacity for transcendence. In this vein, Ishiguro helps us understand that our own lives are just as passive, as conformist, and as blinded to the oppression of ourselves and our brethren all around us. It is difficult to determine the matter; the indeterminacy of the agency of the human subject is the existential point that Ishiguro is getting at. That he uses a non- or post-human subject in order to do so is the benefit of science fiction as a lens through which to denaturalize the most natural-seeming subjects and thus critique the status quo or, as Marcus notes, the "common literary pattern" of human exceptionalism and heroic subjectivity that governs most humanist storytelling. The novel supports both views, ambivalently, thereby asking readers not only to question the nature of agency and the possibility of resistance from below, but also the nature of political projects to actualize their vision of utopia, or revolutionary historical change.

For the remainder of this introduction, I focus on what I call Ishiguro's spatial grammar, which governs the symbolic economy of this novel about clones who do not rebel. After establishing *Never Let Me Go*'s spatial rhetoric in detail, I turn to the novel's science-fictional function as a political allegory. The significance of Ishiguro's allegory of clones as a

universal “species” of minoritarian subject is conceptually and generically beholden to the literary history of abolitionist slave narratives and W. E. B. Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness. Ishiguro’s human clones, as Robbie Goh notes, can be read as figures for the “postclone-nial” condition, by “relocating to the present” the slave analogy (that Ishiguro himself makes, as we see below) in an allegory of the cultural *postmemory* of colonialism.¹¹ These allegorical figures are biopolitical slaves, and their failure to rebel indeed shadows” the quietist political dissidence of the misfit minority position, as well as the limits of human agency in resisting oppression.

The main part of the chapter then focuses on representing a critical geography of the book: the tropes and images that stud the text of the novel itself, as well as in demonstrating the repeated use of such spatial rhetoric as being in tension with *NLMG*’s central thematic concern with resistance and capitulation. I argue that, in a novel so premised on the notion of limited time—the clones are destined to “complete” before they are middle-aged (81)—the narrative represents a governing representational economy of space. And by a representational economy of space, I refer not only to the novel’s representation of narrative places, such as Hailsham, the boarding school in which the protagonists grow up, which functions symbolically as bulwark against the “harsh, cruel world” of the organ donation system, in the words of its founder, Miss Emily (272). I also mean the use of the metaphors of space to refer to the organ-donation system: chiefly, we see this in the metaphoric use of spatial terms, such “territory” and “the line,” to figuratively signify conversational and mental areas the narrator will not delve into too deeply. Of course, the metaphoric economy extends beyond place, and space, to the use of

specific imagery of significant objects—such as the Judy Bridgewater cassette of the title song, which is lost and then recovered; and such as the image of the balloons held together by strings that Kathy fears will be cut as a metaphor for childhood friends torn apart by the inexorable organ donation system (212–13). All of these, and more, are concrete elements that constitute the narrative discourse if we pay attention to their presence and representation in the novel. Ishiguro’s novel turns on this dialectical symbolism between the dimensions of time and space.

More specifically, I maintain that the novel’s central problematic—why the hapless “students” do not rebel—is clarified by paying attention to the ways in which the narrator and the narrative itself transform fundamental thematic questions about time and temporality, historical agency and living on borrowed time, into questions of space.

The spatial imagination I detect in the workings of the novel entails a fatalistic worldview—a view that change is, if not impossible, then difficult, even undesirable. Such a spatial symbolic economy in the narrative system of *NL MG* entails a focus on physical immobility at the level of individual movement, but also at the level of architectural and geographic stolidity—as we see with the focus on Hailsham as a spatial and ideological symbol for the “humane” system of organ donations. Such a space has regulatory effects, which I examine below, in the rhetoric of boundaries that cannot be crossed, for example. Further, the novel’s reliance on rhetorics and metaphors of spaces, places, and bodies, shows the importance of such a grammar—including the reliance on spatial imagery, and the overreliance on recording the vicissitudes of physical matter itself—as a bulwark against the temporal, the agential, and other modes of effective action and human potentiality.

In a word, the clones do not rebel, because they are wrapped up in chronicling the vicissitudes of being bodies in space, of social relationships defined by how those bodies interact with others and with spaces that regulate the behavior of those bodies—while the underlying temporal dimension of the narrative is all but ignored. That temporal dimension is constituted by the foreshortened lives of the protagonists, and the limited agency and muted affects these clones allow themselves to imagine, or express. In a sense, the two realms of the narrative—story and discourse—are in a specific way at odds. No character entertains in any real way the potential for escape, for change, for revolt, and this is because the narrative discourse is composed of the factuality of confinement, of determination, and of quiescence. The narrator produces a rhetorical bulwark against the latter, in a literal sense, placing physical obstacles to the imaginative potentiality of changing such supposedly existential givens. That they are not givens—that the system of donations need not be obeyed—is the blindspot that readers react against. It is this fatalism that the novel so clearly adopts, by obeying the logic of spatial priority over the demands for change based on transgressing such logic of impasse and inertia. The immobile spaces and blocked agency that mark the narrative rhetoric are fitting, for a narrative about involuntary organ donations and the manufacture of humans as “spare parts” to be used for the betterment of liberal society. The narrator consistently turns away from urgent questions of time—given the abbreviated lives of its main characters—to seemingly tangential observations about space. The two dimensions are poised in dialectical opposition, and, I believe, it is this turn away from the temporal toward the spatial that helps articulate *how* the placidity and inscrutability of Kathy H.’s narrative avoids these urgent questions, forcing the reader into

a sustained vigilance over temporality and in permanent suspense, which is unrelieved by the resolution of the narrative.

Numerous elements or tokens of what I am calling Ishiguro's spatial grammar inform the discourse of the novel. (Interestingly, Ishiguro describes the aesthetic practice of writing his Kafkaesque novel *The Unconsoled* as developing a "dream grammar.")¹² Chief among these tokens of the *spatial* grammar employed in *Never Let Me Go* is the use of concrete nouns metaphorically, such as "territory," "line," "area," and "atmosphere," to refer to the topic of the students' brief lives and their socially subordinate role. We see this especially in Kathy's references to tense moments of near-revelation, when she and her schoolmates instead choose to sidestep this "dodgy territory." Moreover, spatial tropes are counterbalanced by the literal "geography" of the narrative itself. We see not only the symbol or memory of Hailsham, but the school and its grounds as setting. Not simply the imaginary notion of Norfolk that is the "lost corner of England," but also the trip to the real Norfolk, where the students seek Ruth's "possible," or her original genetic donor, and Kathy's later return to a field near it after Tommy's death. Real places are important, even as the narrator utilizes the trope of imaginary spaces to denote the boundaries of acceptable discourse and true knowledge about her situation.

The field in which the novel ends, with Kathy about to return to her car after having gone to it in a rare detour from routine, is a key literal topos in the novel's symbolic economy: its use of spatialization to dampen affect and reflect limited agency, as impasse and inertia, or a boundary that must not be crossed. If "dodgy territory," in metaphoric terms, is to be avoided, then actual territory—a cow field—is the real place to which the

students go to search their origins and their fate. The two are central examples of the critical geography of the narrative discourse. Indeed, some critics, such as Goh, have noted the importance of the motif of “rubbish” as a metaphor and metonym for the status of the cloned students themselves.¹³ At Hailsham, during the “Sales,” they receive second-hand goods, the worthless cast-offs from the outside world of “normal” people, who belong to a socio-economic marketplace from which the students are temporarily, and hypocritically, “sheltered.” The students collect these second-hand objects, along with each others’ artworks, in “Collection Chests,” wherein they treasure goods that others have thrown away—fragments they have shored against the ruins of their future lives. The cassette tape that plays the title song is the key object in this narrative grouping. The stranded boat that Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy visit near the end of their lives is another (220–27). But the field bears special mention, insofar as it operates semantically quite similarly to the metaphors of imaginary fields or “territory” that the students avoided at all costs. Indeed, there is a curious literalization of geographic metaphors in the novel, as Cynthia F. Wong and Grace Crummett note (216). But, to extend this line of inquiry, while many spatial metaphors are made literal, or reified, many literal spaces are vaporized, and made metaphoric. James Wood, in his review, also implies the chiasmic effect of the novel’s rhetoric, noting “what is strangely successful” is the way it “rubs its science fictional narrative from the rib of the real, making it breathe with horrid plausibility, and then ... converts that science fiction back into the human, managing to be at once sinister and ordinarily affecting.”¹⁴ From the spiders that stand as a metaphor for the fear Kathy and

her peers evoke in Madame (Marie Claude), to the “islands of lucidity” that Kathy imagines as she stares into Ruth’s eyes, while Ruth suffers her last throes (234).

Indeed, a quick perusal of Ishiguro’s other novels, and published interviews, demonstrates the consistency of the author’s propensity for spatial rhetoric. What we might call the author’s geographic imagination is revealed as a veritable stylistic signature, even outside the “protected world” of Hailsham. And so, while the logic of spatiality runs rampant in this novel, it also appears as significant in the author’s other fictions. Witness the mythical England of *Remains of the Day*; the nostalgic post-War Japan drawn from childhood memory, which constitutes the settings and locales of *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*; and, finally, the comforts of privileged captivity as a defense against the bleak future of *Never Let Me Go*.

Forgetting the Future: or, Ignorance of Historical Geography

In a 1990 essay, David Harvey, in “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination,” discusses commodity fetishism in the context of the social construction of geography and history. He understands certain constructs of space and time we share—such as the worker’s eight-hour day, or the college credit-hour—as socioeconomic products of capitalism’s political force and historical development. Such temporal concepts do not exist in nature, and they are relative to other epochs, other civilizations. Harvey, indeed, claims that the hallmark of capitalism is its drive to master space by time, seen, for example, in the global corporation’s ability to scale vast distances in order to create new markets and derive greater profits.¹⁵ Harvey calls such conquest of

space a part of capitalism's originary conquest of time. And he ties the logic of commodity fetishism to this larger narrative. By the "fetishism of commodities," Harvey writes, Marx "sought to capture" "the way in which markets conceal social [and] geographical" "information and relations.... The grapes that sit upon the supermarket shelves are mute; we cannot see the fingerprints of exploitation upon them or tell immediately what part of the world they are from" (422–23).

This is the fetish of the commodity as a magical object made without visible labor, whose provenance is unknown and unnecessary to know. The "veil on this *geographical and social ignorance*," Harvey notes, must be lifted: we must make ourselves aware of these issues, rather than continue fetishizing these objects and ignoring the geographic and social exploitation that might lie behind it, as in the products of colonialism or neocolonialism (423; emphasis added). Such geographical and historical ignorance "arises out of the fetishism of commodities," Harvey warns, and we must take care not to ignore the social and geographic realities behind consumption. He adds,

We will arrive at a fetishistic interpretation of the world (including the objective social definitions of space and time) *if we take the realm of individual experience (shopping in the supermarket, traveling to work and picking up money at the bank) as all there is*. These latter activities are real and material, but their organization is such as to conceal the other definitions of space and time set up in accordance with the requirements of commodity production. (423; emphasis added)

In a sense, the logic of commodity fetishism, what Harvey calls "geographic and social ignorance" is the logic of Kathy's narration, which predominantly focuses on a sentimentalized "realm of individual experience ... as all there is." Such limited spatial logic and limited attention "conceals the other definitions of space and time" that relate to the broader political dimension of the novel. Many critics decry the narrator's discourse,

and how it veils the realities of bondage, exploitation, and early death, through a focus on the domestic details of “individual experience,” the love triangle between Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth: a focus on describing their sentimental education.

Harvey ties the lifting of the veil of commodity fetishism—of geographical ignorance—to the possibility for social change. Ironically, Miss Emily’s advocacy for the “humane treatment” of the clones lifts one veil only to replace it with another. For a Hailsham education inculcates the students in geographical and social ignorance—and not simply in the faulty geography lesson about Norfolk as the “lost corner of England” (65–66). The positive sense in which Hailsham’s humane treatment—and its humanistic education—lifted the veil was in bringing the clones out of the “darkness” of human ignorance: “for a long time, people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere, or at most that they grew in a kind of vacuum” (262). Humans preferred not to know where the clones came from. It was Hailsham, along with the Glenmorgan House and the Saunders Trust, that lifted the veil on the clones being kept “in the dark,” as “[s]hadowy objects in test tubes,” and subject to “horrors” of mistreatment (261).

And, significantly, this lifting of the veil was enacted through exhibitions of the students’ artwork. Miss Emily gives the students a factual history lesson at the end of the novel (“you must try and see it historically”): “at the height of our influence, we were organising large events all around the country. There’d be cabinet ministers, bishops, all sorts of famous people coming to attend. There were speeches, large funds pledged. ‘There, look!’ we would say. ‘Look at this art! How dare you claim these children are anything less than fully human?’ ” (262). The movement lifted the veil and showed the humanistic art

the students were capable of making, as a symbolic argument, as she explains, “*to prove [they] had souls at all*”(260). But the other side of this unveiling is the concealment of the other clones’ lives—and the history that Miss Emily only divulges decades after the beginning of Kathy’s story.

In what follows, I specify what Harvey’s notion of “geographical ignorance” entails: the obsessive representation of all manner of spaces, places, and objects under the veil of fetishistic disavowal. From metaphoric avoidance of the organ donation system as “territory” to be avoided, to the euphemistic naming of certain objects in this system (“students,” not “clones”). The narrative discourse is organized through a severely limited geographical imagination, whose focus on these spaces and objects serves to “conceal ... other definitions of space and time,” definitions organized by the system of the organ donations, which is “set up in accordance with the requirements of commodity production.” In this case, Hailsham is a privileged site of commodity production: the mystifying production of the clones *as* students, and not as the products of slave labor. As I show, a Hailsham education is a geographical and social veiling. After it is shut down, it persists as a memory, retaining its symbolic function as beacon of the redeeming quality of an aesthetic and sentimental humanistic education.

I will return to the significance of the novel’s humanistic discourse of art as index of “the soul.” But first, I delve into the significance of this novel about cloning to the larger project: the theory of the misfit minority, and interpolate how *Never Let Me Go* represents a political allegory of this theoretical proposition.

Cloned Skin, White Masks?

As critic Wai-chew Sim writes, in reference to the novel's blend of the science-fictional with the mundane details of ordinary life, "*Never Let Me Go* gets to balance intriguingly between what is real and what is imaginary. And this also means that it is easier for Ishiguro to achieve his stated goal of getting readers to 'take off' into the realm of metaphor."¹⁶ Sim goes on to claim: "The book invites us to question contemporary society by *relocating it to the present but non-place of science fiction*. Such a setting allows it to acquire wider, allegorical dimensions, to avoid the *literalist interpretations* that have shadowed Ishiguro's fiction" (83; emphasis added). By "literalist interpretations," Sim seems to refer to the reception of Ishiguro's early or so-called "Japanese" novels, such as *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, whose narrative discourse was stereotyped as conveying an essential "Japanese" quality of reticence, dampened affect, and decorous formality.¹⁷ Ishiguro's author statement on the British Council reads:

I am a writer who wishes to write international novels. What is an "international" novel? I believe it to be one, quite simply, that contains a vision of life that is of importance to people of varied backgrounds around the world. It may concern characters who jet across continents, but may ... be set ... in one small locality."¹⁸

This paradoxical, global vision that can "be set firmly in one small locality" exemplifies the *political* line of inquiry of this chapter. And this line of inquiry adduces the novel's spatial grammar as evidence for Ishiguro's exploration of the political conditions of double exile that attend an abstract, collective subject—the clone—caught in the contradictions of the misfit minority position.

But, in connecting the *Never Let Me Go* to the theme of real historical subordination and, by extension, qualifying the way the author handles this theme by representing the

politically ambivalent position of the misfit minority requires further conceptual elaboration. One way that this allegorical leap can be made is to register the reception of Ishiguro as a transnational and transcultural writer, belonging to a postcolonial nexus of writers, like Salman Rushdie, whose novels take on the theme of collective identification. But Ishiguro is apropos for this project because his work, just as robustly, explores nonconformity in the context of collective identity. He localizes politically ambiguous themes of ideological ambivalence with regard to these national, racial, and even species-based allegories of social subordination. Ishiguro's seeming resistance to the politics of identity entails understanding the misfit minority condition of double exile: neither at ease with cultural belonging, nor belonging to majority culture, this figure exists in a particularly painful state of double consciousness.¹⁹

Ishiguro's clones, no less than other fictional representatives of the misfit minority position of social subordination, challenge us with the quietism and fatalism, the relative lack of agency and autonomy, and an ethos redolent of negative affects, that attend to the unresolved condition of double exile. Double exile from majority culture, in the case of Kathy H. and the other Hailsham students, is both easy and difficult to see: the Hailsham contribution to the organized genocide of the organ donation system is a state of "privileged deprivation" and "unwanted freedom," in the words of critic Mark Currie.²⁰ Rather than being misfits within a community united by the experiences of a specific form of social subordination—by not identifying as such, say, in the condition often discussed as false consciousness—the Hailsham students and the clone population in general are complete conformists. How, then, do they share the condition of double exile of the misfit minority, if

the novel's distinction as a political allegory is the complete conformity of this oppressed class?

The answer is twofold. There are two figures for nonconformism in the narrative. The first is Tommy D., who is the antihero type, whose rages as a child set him apart as capable of the extremities of affective expression the other clones seem to lack. As important, beyond his affective explosiveness—for Tommy is distinguished in the narrative for his frequent “rages,” “thunderous bellowing,” or “tantrums,” exploding in anger, for example, for being the last to be picked for a soccer game despite being the best player in the school (7–12, and *passim*). Sianne Ngai calls anger one of the grand, “classical political passions.”²¹ And, thus, in a universe of potentially disruptive affects muted by fetishistic spatial grammar, such explosive and automatic capacity for expressive emotional negativity sets him socially apart.²² According to Ruth, the (often ruthless) social leader of the Hailsham students, “even though Tommy was at Hailsham, he isn’t like a real Hailsham student. *He was left out of everything* and people were always laughing at him” (155; emphasis added). The reason for his outcast status was that Tommy broke the cardinal rule at Hailsham: he resisted the humanistic imperative to draw, to paint, to take the practice of art-making seriously—though the students did not know why, they obeyed this fundamental rule. Tommy was a failed artist, a narrative situation that is the engine of the social plot of the novel—what takes the place of the political plot of the novel, the organ donation system and the imperative to rebel.

As a failed artist, Tommy is perennially ostracized for never creating anything of conventional artistic value, according to the traditional tastes of the Hailsham community,

a judgment based on received notions of Eurocentric values. One of these values is the capacity to render an object with photorealistic verisimilitude; Tommy first gets in trouble for not taking seriously a drawing, and rendering it in the childlike fashion of a much younger student. He is thereafter haunted for his seeming lack of artistic aptitude, for being unable and unwilling to draw according to the dictates of realistic sophistication. His character arc evolves into making those mechanical animals that are the antithesis of Hailsham's conventional approach to the fine arts. His desire to take art seriously, applying his own "inhuman aesthetic," provides the hinge between the seemingly trivial, boarding school social-outcast plot, and the totalitarian *biopolitical* plot of the organ donation system. Tommy, with his grand capacity for "tantrums" and anger, is thus legible as the misfit character among the hyper-conformist social cliques of Hailsham.²³

The second misfit figure, for precisely the opposite reasons of Tommy, is the narrator herself. Kathy H. is one of the longest-lived "carers" in the history of the organ donation system; she outlives both Ruth and, later, Tommy. As the interviewers Wong and Crummett claim, toward the end of the narrative, "Kathy begins to feel she's no longer part of a community, because everybody she once knew is dying or dead." Meanwhile, they add, "there is emptiness and sadness." And Ishiguro agrees. He notes, in his characteristic use of a spatial grammar, that Kathy is stuck. She remains, for the entirety of the narration, in a prolonged adolescence, never proceeding to the next life stage, unable to move on to becoming a donor. Ishiguro responds that he "wanted her to be somebody who felt she wasn't acting her age. All of her peers had gone on to the next stage and she was lingering" (215). Here, "lingering" suggests a collapse of the temporal and the spatial register, fittingly,

for my argument about the novel's symbolic economy, a dialectic of spaces and bodies stuck, unable to act autonomously, their movement determined by the organ donation system, and their time not only foreshortened, but belonging to the institution of their oppression. It is this failure to take into account time, and "lingering" in the spaces of Hailsham, the Cottages, or even the metaphoric spaces of "territories" not to be crossed, that constitutes the complicity of the clones with their own fate—quite literally their complicity in denying time's dominion over their lives, until it is too late.

More pointedly, Kathy's structural position as a carer—and her pride of being one of the best, given her long tenure serving the organ donation system—raises the specter of the minority figure as complicit in her own oppression, as well as instrumental in perpetuating the status quo.

The Souls of Clones

What is more, the novel's representation of the misfit minority position, at the political extreme of quietism and capitulation, depends on more than ignorance of historical geography, a compensatory symbolic economy of spatialization of affects.²⁴ What Jameson would call the political unconscious of *Never Let Me Go* also finds a literary-cultural parallel for the clone allegory in the concept of double consciousness originally formulated by Du Bois. This occurs in two ways: at the conceptual level of staging a scene of double consciousness, and at the formal level of employing certain hallmarks of the abolitionist slave narrative in this staging, as we see below.

Of course, there is the suggestive allegorical signification of the organ-donation system as analogue to the history of colonialism and the slave trade. Both sets of social subordinations are built on categorical denial of the basic humanity of a collective subject, and basing this categorical ontological denial on the discourse of biology—whether anthropomorphism or racism. This parallel is also built on the systematic economic exploitation of these benighted species or races—their treatment as chattel and a biopolitically reproducible resource for extracting the value and labor of human bodies.

I discuss the connection of W. E. B. Du Bois' foundational concept of double consciousness in the first chapter on Harlem Renaissance author Wallace Thurman. But, in this chapter, my interest is in explaining how Ishiguro's speculative fiction, through its generic liberty of transcultural appropriation of historical tradition to explain the contemporary moment, allows for a universal extension of the double-consciousness concept, an allegorical extension that unites variegated histories of minorities and their social subordination under the sign of a universal human subject.²⁵

In other words, one meaning of Ishiguro's literary choices, in symbolic terms, is his fictional escape from the position of writing from a racialized, minoritized self—whiteness here is the unmarked mythological construct of the fetishized commodity. Yet, a novel like *NL MG* seems to redound on this very same political problem. Its political allegorical function as science fiction reconfigures the theme of minority marginalization to an abstract level—a humanizing vision elevating the clones to the status of universal human subject. The political outcome of this vision, however, is ambiguous, which is one problem with Hailsham's model of humanistic aesthetics and the novel's focus on sentimental education.

The novel thus evokes multiple modern histories of enslavement, colonialism, and totalitarianism, and more particularly in its reliance on a biological marker of subordination allegorically resonant with the history of the discourse of “race,” the chattel slavery practiced in the U.S., the Caribbean, and the Western hemisphere. Ishiguro uses the discourse of slavery and of the novel’s allegorical significance on this entirety of human history, in a recent interview published after the release of the film adaptation of *Never Let Me Go*: “None of us were interested in making a story about *the rebellion of slaves*, because we felt there were many stories like that already. In the novel *I was going for an allegory* about the human lifespan and our inability to escape it.”²⁶

Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, making strategic use of liberal humanistic discourse, harbors expressly emancipatory aims, a century before Ishiguro’s politically quietist novel from its conceptual insights. Du Bois’ early-twentieth-century political agenda as a scholar and writer, and as “race man,” was forged with the humanistic tools of the liberal and fine arts (sociology, folklore, and aesthetics—the sorrow songs). His theory of uplift through aesthetic education is not so different from Ishiguro’s, though this novel warps the political imagination of this set of aesthetic values to portray a dark mirror of double consciousness. Du Bois used all the erudition of humanistic expression and African American culture to combat the terroristic domination of the American South, and the global hegemony of white supremacy, whose grotesque ideology denied that Black folks “had souls at all.” Du Bois insisted on the cultural and political importance of humanistic aspiration to advancing the interests of the race, famously combating Booker T. Washington’s functionalist aspirations and racial politics of accommodation.

Ishiguro has written that the cloning theme came late to him: initially, the conception was simply about characters with foreshortened lives. He claims that this idea then merged with the element of science fiction, which lends a pathos and originality to the novel that exceeds Ishiguro's humanistic inspiration. That is to say, this novel is much more than a story about dying young. For Ishiguro claims that he sought to write an allegory in order to write about the human condition itself, or about the "soul," following such great realist novelists like Dostoevsky and Chekhov. Black, in his influential discussion of *NLMG*'s "inhuman aesthetic," emphasizes the importance of the dialectical discourse of "the soul" for the project of redeeming the students' lives dedicated to an art that will not save them.²⁷ It is indeed ironic that Ishiguro needs the element of science fiction in order to be able to write about the soul, a tradition that rests, in part, as implied by his various invocations of nineteenth-century European realism. And what is even more self-contradictory, at least at face value, is that Ishiguro aims to write about the misfit minority's ambivalence toward community as a universal aspect of the human condition. Ishiguro appropriates this grand humanist tradition; but, I argue, his text also borrows from the grand African American tradition of resistance that Du Bois' *The Souls* inaugurated, notably in the depiction of the sorrow songs as aesthetic transcendence of bondage.

The notion that Ishiguro writes about the soul is evident from the fact that the novel situates the practice of art as the only significant "evidence" of the students' having a soul. The students are socially and academically distinguished according to their artistic and literary output—Hailsham is an art academy as much as an English prep school. And a major plot point in the novel is the mysterious Madame (Marie Claude), who comes to take

the best pieces (as determined by the teachers, or Guardians). It is unclear what Madame does with the prized artworks, except that she exhibits them in her Gallery. Why is the “students’ ” art so important? is a central question around which the story revolves, leaving readers in suspense. The question is only answered at the novel’s climax, when Miss Emily, the head of Hailsham, many years later, receives Tommy and Kathy, and he poses this question to her. Miss Emily finally answers with the truth that Tommy intuited. For, the reason their artwork was collected, the reason it was so important to devote their education to the humanistic tradition of fine and liberal arts, was “because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, *we did it to prove you had souls at all*” (260).

There is a signal narrative moment that represents the influence of Du Bois’ early-twentieth-century conceptual insight into Black double consciousness. Double consciousness, Du Bois explains, means living under the Veil of white hegemony and “the terrors of the Ku Klux Klan,” a state of double exile that “wrench[es] the soul” (5). The scene of double consciousness in *NLMG* dramatizes, for the narrator as a young girl of ten or so, Kathy’s double consciousness of being a clone. She sees herself through the eyes of Madame (Marie-Claude), who comes to Hailsham on one of her visits to collect the students’ artwork. Marie Claude makes only periodic visits to Hailsham, and is thus more closely identified with the outside world. The recollected scene begins when, Ruth, claims that Madame is afraid of the students. Ruth, Kathy, and a few other students determine to test this theory by swarming Madame the next time she visits the school. As Madame is walking, the group of students make as if to accost her, at the last minute swerving out of her way, just to see her reaction. And Madame recoils in fright, a moment that Kathy

narrates as constituting the first time she realizes how she and other “students” are seen by “normal” humans. They are seen as “creatures,” “spiders,” evoking fear in their eyes.

Kathy then views herself in that distorted mirror, the narrative actually using the metaphor of the mirror to describe this feeling:

[W]e were just at that stage when we knew a few things about ourselves—about who we were, how we were different from our guardians, from the people outside—but hadn’t yet understood what any of it meant.... So you’re waiting, even if you don’t quite know it, waiting for the moment when you realise that you really are different to them; that there are people out there, like Madame, who don’t hate you or wish you any harm, but who nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you—of how you were brought into this world and why—and who dread the idea of your hand brushing theirs. The first time you glimpse yourself through the eyes of a person like that, it’s a cold moment. It’s like walking past a mirror you’ve walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange. (Ishiguro 36)

This scene resonates as a flash of self-recognition mediated by the dominant gaze of the other that is a hallmark of Du Bois’ conception of double consciousness. This post-recoil moment reveals the difference that shadows the narrator and the other “students” of Hailsham. This primal scene is notable in many ways, but primarily for the way in which it raises the issue of objectified selfhood, a hallmark of subalternity in theories that are themselves derived from Du Bois’ in his original terms, in the context of the Black experience and the terrors of the Jim Crow era. Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic*, provides a helpful gloss of Du Bois’ famous concept.²⁸ Gilroy interprets the notion of double consciousness as being primarily about “insight”: insight into what Du Bois memorably called the “peculiar sensation ... this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois 7).

Beyond the allegorical parallel in the scene to the experience of double consciousness that Du Bois understood and clarified a century before this novel was written, there is also the formal significance of the first-person voice of Kathy's adult narrator recollecting the episode of seeing herself as a spider. This is the first inkling the reader gets of the vague understanding that there is a real social division that separates her and all of the other students from "people out there." Beyond thematically signifying on the Black experience of double consciousness, this scene echoes a signal narrative moment in the abolitionist slave narrative. There, too, the first-person narrator experiences that childhood moment of traumatic social awakening, when she first finds out she is a slave. As in the first-person accounts of abolitionist slave narratives, the narrator experiences a decisive break from her cultivated ignorance of the status quo and her abjected sense of self: "the moment when you realise that you really are different to them"; "there are people out there, like Madame ... [who] shudder at the very thought of you." Kathy here relates how she and her schoolmates suffered a moment of traumatic insight into being an objectified subject of social subordination. The clone metaphor signifies as/on race. But, more specifically, the novel signifies on a canonical Black modernist literary tradition that inaugurated the concept of double consciousness.

I am not the first critic to argue that there is a certain allegorical resonance in this theme of a stigmatized group whose status as social subjects is deeply contingent on their humanistic potential—their potential as possessing properly human souls is dependent on their capacity to produce properly soulful art. However, what makes this novel a *misfit* representation of the theme of double consciousness, as a hallmark of the social

subordination of minority groups, is the lack of rebellion, its signal quality. As critic Karl Shaddox notes, a key difference between the abolitionist slave narrative and *Never Let Me Go* concerns the

attitudes towards oppressors. In abolitionist slave narratives, rebellion and subversion occur throughout the genre. Though there are a few outbursts of rage in *NLMG* from the clones, they are private and undirected. Finally, unlike the slave narrators, the clones are virtually free to roam at large and yet at no time do they attempt to escape their institutional enslavement.²⁹

That Ishiguro does not belong to the historical literary tradition that is kin to the abolitionist genre of the slave narrative, even the neo-slave narrative developed in the twentieth-century, poses an important and thorny dilemma. The novel's allegorical function as science fiction makes this connection useful, if not necessary: Gilroy notes Du Bois' universalizing motives in *The Souls*, an urge toward moving beyond the limited context of U.S. modernity. Ishiguro is the least properly American of my authors, and so Gilroy is particularly useful in this project on diasporic narratives, even within a pan-Africanist focus.³⁰ Gilroy adduces broad global influences of Du Bois' thought, including German idealism, and claims that "Du Bois produced this concept [of double consciousness] at the junction point of his philosophical and psychological interests not just to express the distinctive standpoint of black Americans but also to illuminate the experience of post-slave populations in general. Beyond this, he uses it as a means to animate a dream of global co-operation among peoples of colour" (126).

“If you are to lead decent lives....”

And yet, despite the novel’s early representation of the tropes of double consciousness and subaltern identity (31–36), these profound political insights are seemingly forgotten. The shock of recognition does not lead to greater knowledge of “who we were,” but to other moments of recognition that are remembered and also then half-forgotten. The novel presents an iterative process of coming to terms with how the students are “different from [their] guardians, from the people outside,” and then the suspension of this knowledge. The novel is a frustrating series of the students’ remembering who they are, and where they come from, and then forgetting or discounting these momentary glimpses of their real historical and political location. Besides this childhood “spiders” episode, other moments bring up the same process of recognition and then, typically, of *letting go of this recognition*.

Chief among these scenes is Miss Lucy’s “You’ve been told and not told” speech. This is a powerfully revelatory scene, in which one of the guardians, Lucy Wainwright, fed up with school policy against articulating “the whole territory” of the donations, aims to shock the students out of their studied ignorance:

The problem, as I see it, is that you’ve been told and not told. You’ve been told, but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way. But I’m not. If you’re going to have decent lives, then you’ve got to know and know properly. None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you. You’ll become adults, then before you’re old, before you’re even middle-aged, you’ll start to donate your vital organs. That’s what each of you was created to do. You’re not like the actors you watch on your videos, you’re not even like me. You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. (Ishiguro 81)

Here Miss Lucy explodes the mass hypocrisy that Hailsham runs on: an attitude of contrived deception or willed ignorance: “You’ve been told, but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way”; later, Miss Emily admits, “we *fooled* you” (268). Miss Lucy lifts the veil—or Veil, following Du Bois—and Miss Emily draws it down again, over the students’ eyes, shielding them (“We sheltered you”). Lucy Wainright’s rationale is significant: “If you are to lead decent lives....” In the context of the cloned children and Hailsham, “decency” was sacrificed to the ideal of what Miss Emily calls their childhood: “We gave you your childhoods” (266). Ishiguro himself speaks to the necessity of shielding *his* children, all children, from the harsh realities of the world; that is part of good parenting (Interview with Wong and Crummett 218–19). And who could disagree?

Yet, what does “decency” mean, in this context? Decency, from Miss Lucy’s point of view, means dispelling the children’s false consciousness, in a very literal sense. For they entertain naïve notions of being Hollywood actors, or even supermarket clerks, knowing—half-knowing—that these possible futures are quite impossible. The truth, then, is what living a decent life means: not living a lie, not fooling yourself, or not letting others fool you, as the students did, as Kathy herself admits in their “cosy” discussion of impossible “dream futures” (142–43). Miss Lucy was right. Admitting where you come from; acknowledging the trauma of double consciousness; not living in the false consciousness of not knowing who you are: these are the principles of living a decent life.

The narrative, despite Lucy Wainright, returns to a discourse that spatializes these “dream futures” into petrified scenes of naive escape. The *politics* of place and body are

sacrificed for the *rhetoric* of place and body—local, transient, perishable, and meaningless, at times. And yet, as Rebecca Walkowitz argues, this focus on the small may be a way of tying it to the “unimaginable largeness” that serves as a backdrop for more self-important treatments of these same themes in other modern (or postmodern) works.³¹ Ishiguro’s small scale, however, risks what his own students do, when they ignore the reality of their situation, and narrate banal stories, and people their lives with objects while their own bodies are taken away. “If you are to lead decent lives....” Miss Lucy says. Is it “decent” for the novel to apply the logic and rhetoric of place when this logic obscures the temporal dimension—the dimension in which true historical change must be enacted?

Spatial Tropes, or, The Narrative’s Focus on Spaces, Places, and Things

This part of my analysis builds on the geography of the novel so far described, to argue that the novel itself builds its own series of spatial metaphors as a way to let go of inconvenient truths—truths chiefly related to time and fate. In two senses, this section looks at a geography of the novel. I examine a persistent feature of the novel as I read it: its use of spatial metaphors, symbols, and concrete images—as well as its representation of literal objects, places, and spaces—that constitute its topological rhetoric. I build on the critical geography extending into the novel, to draw out the narrative’s own style of discourse, which is to consistently deploy the spatial senses and to use tropes of concrete spaces, bodies, and places. By so doing, I am drawing a geography of the internal pathways and significant topoi encompassed by the narrator’s discourse.

There is a mechanical consistency with which spatial metaphors are used to portray this predilection for letting go of important knowledge, letting go of important people, by not inquiring too much, by not fighting against predetermination, by doing as and how they are told. The spatial rhetoric is thus consonant with the inhuman aesthetic Black argues vindicates the quietist politics of this novel, by privileging the secondary, the nonhuman—what the organ donation system maligns as holding no intrinsic social value. As I discuss in my conclusion, however, the challenge of the misfit minority position is its politics of misfire. In this case, quietism and anthropomorphism, complicity and eugenics, go hand in hand; the misfit minority shares the condition of double exile and the symbolic trauma of double consciousness, but opts to let go of this political insight, and spaces out in “cosy states of suspension,” contemplating “dream futures,” letting the system grind them down mercilessly.

A principal rhetorical pathway of this opting out of the realities of the system is the concrete metaphor of space, the repeated use of the words “territory” and “line.” Two important instances of this deployment of the metaphor of “territory” occur: one, when Kathy describes how, dating back to their early years, the students avoided the “whole territory surrounding the donations,” and refused to go “beyond a certain line,” beyond which lay the “horror movie stuff” of the donation program (279). This moment toward the end of the novel is only the most conspicuous instance of Kathy’s predilection for self-deception, her tendency to go along with the paternalistic deception of the Hailsham guardians (“you were told and not told”). By this moment, Kathy has “lost Ruth,” and she is about to lose Tommy to fourth donation (286). Just before he is to undergo the final

“donation,” Kathy is his carer, and tries to assuage his fears. She then recollects how many donors have “heard the same talk”:

How maybe, after the fourth donation, even if you’ve technically completed, you’re still conscious in some sort of way; how then you find there are more donations, plenty of them, on *the other side of that line*; how there are no more recovery centres, no carers, no friends; how there’s nothing to do except watch your remaining donations until they switch you off. It’s horror movie stuff, and most of the time people don’t want to think about it. Not the whitecoats, not the carers—and usually not the donors. But now and again, a donor will bring it up, as Tommy did that evening, and I wish now we’d talked about it. As it was, after I dismissed it as rubbish, we both *shrank back from the whole territory*. (279; emphasis added)

This is as close the narrative gets to saying what actually happens to the bodies in literal biophysical and medical terms.³² But still, the details that Kathy relates in this passage are treated as only rumor, and more akin to the scary “stuff” of a “horror movie,” and not necessarily accurate or even probable description of what actually happens (“*maybe* after fourth donation”). There is, then, much distancing from the very details she is about to describe, since it is mere hearsay (“you’ll have heard the same talk”), and “even the doctors had no certain answers” as to their veracity (279). The revelation of the potential horror of fourth donation is thus couched in the realm of wild speculation, mere gossip, as it is prefaced by disclaimers as to the reliability of these details as facts. Kathy also flatly denies the veracity of this description to Tommy when he brings it up: “It’s just a lot of rubbish, Tommy. Just wild, wild talk. It’s not even worth thinking about” (279). Her denial is perhaps a sign of Kathy’s love for Tommy, and not wanting him to suffer before he submits to their common fate. Of course, as Tommy’s carer, Kathy might (also) be saying this to keep him from getting “‘agitated’” (the latter being the term for donors who resist with their own bodies and affects). The gesture can be read both ways (3). For this scene,

the last we see of Tommy, hearkens back to Kathy H.'s opening monologue, when she boasts how her donors' "recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as 'agitated,' even before fourth donation" (Ibid). And Tommy is now at that point.

And then, what Kathy dismisses as "wild talk" is grammatically contained in one sentence—which paradoxically renders it more noticeable, as it departs from the narrator's placid equanimity regarding the "whole territory" of donations. So, in one extended paratactic utterance, Kathy relays a chilling vision of what happens "after you've technically completed." Here, note the lexical and syntactic repetition and parallelism: the use of a series of semicolons, followed by the same relative pronoun and parallel structure to each clause: "*How maybe, after fourth donation ... how then ... how there ... how there's*" The parataxis helps to speed through the list of horrors in one fell swoop, which lends the utterance great momentum, as Kathy is in a great hurry to get through it and go back to the narrative status quo. This status quo is what Kathy is so good at: her euphemistic, nonspecific, often evasive, *spatially metaphorical* references to the donation program, a rhetorical tropism that closes off this very utterance ("we both shrank back from the whole territory").

By contrast, this moment voices an oppositional story in a different, febrile style of discourse from that which characterizes Kathy's usual rhetoric. This utterance is chillingly direct, graphic, and cognitively defamiliarizing to the reader. The statement is structured by parataxis and parallelism, lending the utterance an incantatory quality. Each clause builds on the one before, and *unbuilds* the euphemistic semantic edifice of the donation

program, by cogently describing the *unbuilding* of the body of the donor in real time (“more donations, plenty of them”), while the donor is just conscious enough to “watch” “until they switch you off.”

I chose this moment to represent the recurring rhetorical tic of spatializing the fears and realities of the donation system, the recourse to spatial metaphors, such as we see with the “[shrinking] back from the whole territory,” and a metaphorical and symbolic “line” that is only in this passage ever crossed. In a figurative sense, then, this passage exemplifies the spatial metaphors of “the line” and “territory” that the narrator consistently deploys to bracket and ward off the “horror movie” particulars of the clones’ actual lives. Narrated in retrospect, after having lost Tommy to fourth donation, Kathy continues with the reminiscence: “Now and again, a donor will bring it up [what happens at fourth donation], as Tommy did that evening, and I wish now we’d talked about it” (279). And yet, she did not bring it up. And so they let it go, and Kathy, in the present tense of the narrative, regrets having done so, in the same way implicitly drawing a parallel to having to let go of *Tommy*.³³

The novel’s final scene epitomizes Kathy’s sentimental spatial attachments, which guard against mobilizing agency to change political reality. This is an ending reminiscent of Proust’s in *Du côté de chez Swann*, in which subjective memory transfigures the stolidity of space into a vision of space as historical, and as “fugitive” as time.³⁴ And yet, the ending subverts, and conforms with, the mystifying spatial grammar used up to this point. In one of Kathy’s last moments before becoming a donor herself, she indulges in a sentimental *and* political vision of space—“a fantasy thing”—that clearly indicates her running out of time

(288). She stands in an empty field in Norfolk, a field cordoned off by wire fence. The wire fencing is emblematic, as the reality of her situation is now inescapable: she has gotten notice of her impending first donation. Stepping out of the usual routine, Kathy comes back to Norfolk, the mythical “lost corner of England,” site of the childhood dream where everything and everyone lost will magically return. This is also the same field in which Tommy had his last irruption of affective resistance, after learning that the “dream of being able to defer” was, like Norfolk, also just a myth (259).³⁵ Kathy fantasizes that Tommy reappears in the distance, walks toward her, and that he would “wave, maybe even call” (288). The emotionally charged space of the field allows for, and subsequently dampens, the potentially disruptive affect of Kathy’s fantasy of mourning. Predictably, this affective resistance to death is a mere “fantasy thing,” grammatically apparitional, and Kathy’s double consciousness acknowledges the apparition as such. It is a mere fantasy, understood as just that (just a “thing”).

Thus, the potential redemption of the clone’s political situation is in the shape of a “thing,” as even this dream of Tommy would “*maybe* even call.” Even in her dream, there is no way out, no possibility of transcendence—only of a momentary site of imagined deferral. This vision is not at all what is actually possible, and Kathy knows it. In this final, potent scene of double consciousness, Kathy observes the quality of her own affective reaction after this fantasy apparition that does not actually appear, noting that “although the tears rolled down” her face, she “wasn’t sobbing or out of control.” She adds: “I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off wherever it was I was supposed to be” (288). This final sentence illustrates the preoccupation with geography and spatiality as

bulwark against political time. “[W]herever it was I was supposed to be” indicates the location of the narrator in space (“wherever it was”) as the properly political definition of her subject position: Kathy stands quite openly, in this scene, as a pure function of the organ donation system. Her function as carer is determined by where she must be, not *who* she must be. In grammatical terms, a carer is a “where” and a donor is a “what”—both defined by their spatial location, or spatial function. Despite the fantasy of Tommy’s transcending their politically existential situation, in the dream of Tommy’s return after fourth donation, it is significant that Kathy’s affect is quickly turned off, after being briefly surrendered, and that Kathy goes on to fulfill her political function and destiny.

It is just as significant that, a few moments earlier, after getting notice of her first donation, Kathy is again sentimentally captive to a space—Hailsham—which serves to succor her rapidly approaching obsolescence. Hailsham, although no longer in existence in the real world, exists in the mind’s eye, “where no one can take it away from me.” Indeed, Kathy claims that she’s “glad” she will not ever find the real Hailsham—“I’m glad that’s the way it’ll be.” She adds, “it’s like with my memories of Tommy and of Ruth” (286). They, too, although gone, completed, and never to be found, will persist as special memories located “safely in her head.” A dream past replaces dream futures.

In this section, I have tried to show that *NLMG* employs, at various levels, spatial rhetorical features and devices, some of these functioning as metaphors for political evasion or for figuratively containing the existential peril of the organ donation system. Ishiguro’s narrative grammar is evidently spatial, in his novels’ sustained focus on the logic and rhetoric of place, even international place, and especially mythical places. Rather than

simply assign the political significance of this spatial grammar, I have sought to chart its rhetorical manifestations, drawing a virtual map of the “islands of lucidity” as another of Ishiguro’s famed narrative techniques of rhetorical evasion, in *Never Let Me Go*.

What is interesting to discover, through this attention to the importance of the narrator’s spatial rhetoric, is how limited this geographic understanding is, and how sharply it contrasts the central thematic of time in the novel—living on borrowed time. As I have shown, in many ways and in several cases, the rhetoric of space, and bodies, paradoxically serves to divert attention from the existential peril borne by the cloned students: precisely the peril of losing their bodies.

Throughout the novel, tokens or metaphors of the spatial connect a personal, human register of embodiment to an impersonal, inhuman one. The field is the real, geographic setting tied to this loved one’s lost body; and the field, moreover, is tied to the inexorability of the organ-donation system, which governs *Kathy*’s body just as well. And so her parting words are: “*wherever* it was I was supposed to be.” These subjects are as linked by space—Hailsham being the absolute token of this link—as they are by their radical vulnerability to time and premature death.³⁶

Conclusion: Haunting Belonging

The history of social minorities of every stripe is generally the history of human socialization as such. Ishiguro’s science-fictional allegory interpolates this history in its bleakest form—in the modern terms of biopolitical enslavement and systematic social parasitism. The systems of social oppression operated well before the politics of cultural

identity were named as such, but also continue through the present day. To an author such as Ishiguro, who is well aware of his minoritarian position as a transcultural and transnational author known for writing about Englishness, this double consciousness is uniquely represented in this allegory of clones. The novel serves as a stark reminder of the extremes of the universal human condition under the sign of subordination and minoritarian social death.

Doing so, of course, supports critiques that Ishiguro sustains a discomfort with collective identity in the form of racial/ethnic specificity. Simply put, here, clonality performs as coloniality. Ishiguro turns to a metaphor for a universal human condition that is grounded in a poetics of enslavement—the minoritarian becomes universal, in a darkly utopian allegory. This is how a misfit minority sensibility rapidly becomes deeply suspect politically, eliding the specificities of historical resistance and collective projects of uplift and reformation, if not revolution.

But Ishiguro's turn to *NLMG* and a post-human minority, in order to stake an unassailable claim on the human from that point of view, resonates even in its problematic utopian gestures. The twentieth century has seen the emergence and transformation of the representative voices of cultural belonging, to the point that, I argue, the politics of being a minority must be more capacious than simply turning on an axiological axis: good or bad, salutary or dangerous. It matters that the minority authors in my study—who are, in the world literary system, relatively peripheral, but also relatively central—are tenaciously contrarian against the expected politics of uplift, respectability, and compulsory optimism

that have grown to become automata in our imagination of resistance as a social form, a social narrative.

Thus, my project as a whole argues that we do more than dismiss such misfit figures as merely “self-loathing,” suffering from internalized racism, passing as “white,” and so forth. Instead, my project seeks to understand the misfit minority position as problematic *and* plural, variably represented in literary fiction’s performative constructions of this political subjectivity, which go far beyond uplifting representations and liberal-humanist agency and autonomy. These constructions go so far beyond the conformist burden of representation, to paraphrase Susan Sontag, as to make us nervous.

In the quietist politics of this speculative fiction, we see the extremity of the weakness of the misfit minority position. The novel represents the misfit’s weakness in not wanting to be free. Their willingness to remain ignorant, in this case, means letting things and people go, an interest in self-deception, a feature that typically defines the unreliability of all of Ishiguro’s narrators. But here, the meaning is tied to a discrete scene of social subordination, in this case an allegory of coloniality and enslavement more radical than in any of the other fictions. *Never Let Me Go* takes Ishiguro’s interest in metaphors of social reality beyond their local contexts—his deploying a “myth” of the “English butler,” say, in *Remains of the Day*, but wanting that myth to be universally applicable precisely because it is more a metaphor than a realistic portrayal of “being an English butler.”³⁷ As I have argued, this speculative novel borrows conceptually (in the staging of double consciousness) and generically (in utilizing formal features of the historical abolitionist slave narrative). Beyond the dilemma of misappropriation, however, the novel’s cloning of the discourse of

double consciousness is distinctive for its problematic representation of an unreconstructed vision of the Veil: one of self-abnegation, complicity and cooperation, and the fatalistic failure to rebel. In other words, if *NLMG* borrows the conceptual insights of Du Boisian double consciousness, it also does away with the reconstructed, collective agent that Du Bois envisioned: “being a problem is a strange experience,” Du Bois writes at the beginning of “Our Spiritual Strivings” (2). It is not enough, he warns, to meekly accede to “the suicide of a race” (8): the goal is “to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use [one’s] best powers and ... latent genius” (3). He then adds, significantly, “These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten” (Ibid).

Is it possible that Du Bois’ “past” is our present, following the counterfactual logic of Ishiguro’s novel? That the “waste, dispersal, and forgetting” he decries in the global history of the transatlantic slave trade persists, in those who fail to see “the beauty revealed to [them] ... the soul-beauty of a race which [their] larger audience despised, and [so they] could not articulate the message of another people” (4)? This other side of the looking-glass of double consciousness names the double exile of a structural position. At times, or always, ignorant of history, or willfully living in that “past” structure of stark social subordination, and “wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation,” the misfit minority is positioned in this impossible moment of decision, forever negotiating “two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals,” unable to “merge his double self into a better and truer self” (3).

Never Let Me Go is a contemporary, allegorical, and extreme example of the modern representation of the double consciousness, the fatally non-oppositional ethos, of the misfit minority as a distinct social position. This contrarian figure locates a literary-cultural representation of identity largely conditioned by the negative affects and ineffective “strivings” of trying to reconcile “two unreconciled” “ideals”: “turning hither and thither in hesitant and doubtful striving [making] his very strength ... lose effectiveness, [and] seem like absence of power, like weakness” (3–4). Such benighted, anachronistic (even in Du Bois’ time), misfit negotiations of “spoiled identity,” in Erving Goffman’s terms, convey a political resonance of this “past” that is not even past, in Faulkner’s famous phrase.³⁸

The nonconformist representations in my literary-cultural study manifest this antisocial ethos that is rooted in seeing belonging as an abstract burden consistent with the experience of social marginality. The clone metaphor shows an impulse toward abstraction in Ishiguro’s negotiation of the vicissitudes of minoritarian subjectivity. One could see this turn to the abstract as another escape route, again indulging in the misfit’s self-loathing, a penchant for haunting cultural belonging, while haunted by it. Construing oneself as an abstract essence (“minority”), rather than a particular, situated, and culturally memorialized form of social identity, indicates the avoidance of that “reconciliation,” and the continuity of that “warring,” and divided “striving,” ending up in shame and weakness. Ishiguro’s speculative leap from coloniality to clonality, insisting on a vision of universality across heterogeneous histories of social difference and social subordination, is easily dismissible as an aesthetic abstraction: an irresponsible yet “cosy suspension,” in Kathy’s

own words, from the responsibilities of adult personhood, agency, and thus the burden and promise of transformative collective identity and politics.³⁹

And so, given the clone metaphor as allegorical alibi, this novel exemplifies the misfit minority's puerile ethos of powerlessness and helplessness, of quietism and quiet suffering, rather than a rugged individualism of adult capacity and responsibility. *Never Let Me Go* represents an ironic appropriation—and revelation?—of the Du Boisian conception of double consciousness as a contemporary literary-cultural phenomenon. By so doing, Ishiguro intimates that such a state of double suspension allegorically accounts for the quietist lives of most human beings, who do not rebel. But there is resistance, in small ways, in the sentimental education of love—past tokens of a cherished captivity, living in a present suspended from the future. Even so, such an account of the minority position as complicit with social subordination, even social death, constitutes a serious exploration of the thorniness of lived cultural identity. Ishiguro, in this sense, extends the legacy of Du Bois' modernist insight into the present.

Regarding the “desire called utopia,” Jameson writes that science fiction allows us to view “the present as history.”⁴⁰ In this case, Ishiguro writes a story of a global, historical present through the science-fictional lens as a contemporary metaphor for the commonality of human existence. In so doing, he universalizes the position that he himself calls “the slave.” The literary conceit of an “international” speculative history (history is what hurts, Jameson also said) is presented from a radically limited, complicit, misfit minority perspective, a project whose modern roots—or routes—were traced by Du Bois. By aiming toward being an international author, Ishiguro, in this allegorical fashion, has answered his

critics. *Never Let Me Go* answers both the critics who only saw Ishiguro as minoritarian author, or mere representative of an ethnic other (of the “Japanese” novels); and those critics, like Cheng-mei Ma, who saw his later fiction as mode of whiteface.

His literary practice in this novel thus engages with a species of biopolitical social subordination that maintains the misfit sensibility’s tension between identity-dissolving and identity-constituting paradigms of minority existence. Ishiguro provincializes and decenters the twin yet irreconcilable discourses of racialization from a hegemonic and counter-hegemonic position, and does so by representing the double consciousness and double exile of the misfit minority as the position that engages with both senses of political history. That this sense of history is in actuality an escape from it—a turn to a geographic, rather than historical, imagination that “forgets the future”—underscores the extremity and reality of history itself as what must be suspended, curtailed off, negotiated, at the individual level *as well as* at the collective level of what we think of as resistance.

The answer, as Ishiguro notes, is not so simple as wanting to rebel. Ishiguro answers the political challenge posed by this affecting allegory about subjection and abjection, about human clones as slaves, and as a figure for the human condition: “I was much more interested in the extent to which we accepted our fates, the kind of lives we were allowed to live as people, rather than focus on the rebellious spirit” (215). He adds,

I think this is predominantly what takes place in the world, that people take the life they feel they’ve been handed. They try their best to make it good. They don’t really try to go outside of that. They say with varying degrees, “This is my life. I’m going to do the best with what I’ve been given. I will try to gain dignity and worth.... If I make mistakes because I’m only human, maybe I can put them right before it’s too late.” I think most people live in that kind of world. Nothing is a perfect metaphor for the human condition. This is just one metaphor for one aspect of how people are. (215)

With this metaphor, Ishiguro proposes that all humans are minoritized by “fate,” that all experience subjection to the biopolitical forces that administer life and the agency that an individual human life is allowed to exercise. The answer is, not much. Not much agency, not much time. Not much (of a) life. A significant political aspect of this metaphor, as we have seen, is the location of the universal in a most benighted form of being minor, of being a minority: United not in a collective “rebellious spirit,” but rather in their meek acceptance of “the life they feel they’ve been handed.” Such quietism is a signal disposition of the misfit minority.

That is the bleak utopianism of *Never Let Me Go*, and the dark logic of holding on to the negative particulars of social difference, while refusing the *majoritarian ethos* of Prometheus, of rebellion. To refuse such solace is to insist on the continued social structures of domination that transcend human insight. This sensibility insists, “we don’t really go outside of that,” that things cannot change. Instead of immediately countering with optimistic utopias of social transformation, Ishiguro’s novel symbolically argues for experiencing the pessimism and the historical hurt of this position. Such hurt must be encountered, rather than dismissed, understood, rather than judged, as an argument for the vision of impossibility and the limited agency that history affords some of us (some of them). It is a flawed argument—history shows us that it is demonstrably false; social change does happen, will happen, and not by being quiet about it. But this is the misfit minority report.

NOTES

¹ Ishiguro quoted in interview with Tim Adams, “‘For Me, England Is a Mythical Place,’” *The Guardian* (19 February 2005), 2, 1–7 (print version). Web. Accessed 19 June 2013.

² Kazuo Ishiguro, “‘I’m Sorry I Can’t Say More’: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro,” an interview with Sean Matthews, in *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes (London: Continuum, 2009), 114–25, 124. Further references embedded parenthetically in the text.

³ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber, 2005; New York: Random House, 2005). Henceforth abbreviated as *NLMG*, further page references to the novel are to first U.S. paperback edition of *Never Let Me Go* (New York: Vintage, 2006) and embedded parenthetically in the text.

⁴ Shameem Black, “Ishiguro’s Inhuman Aesthetics,” *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 55.4 (2009): 785–807, 789. Further references to Black embedded parenthetically in the text.

⁵ Bruce Robbins makes this point in “Cruelty is Bad: Banality and Proximity in *Never Let Me Go*,” *Novel* 40.3 (2007): 289–302. For more on the influential concept of “bare life,” see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). The original concepts of biopower, biopolitics, and governmentality are Michel Foucault’s. For more on biopower and biopolitics, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley (1978; New York: Vintage, 1990); *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, tr. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, tr. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003). For more on the concept of governmentality, see Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, tr. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007); and *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982–1983*, tr. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2010).

⁶ In the terms of Herbert Marcuse’s *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, tr. Marcuse and Erica Sherover (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), Ishiguro’s text represents an aesthetic ideology based not on the heroic, conventional, and usually male, Promethean figure of Western narratives, but a Narcissistic one. Rather than social revolution, we have personal contemplation, a feature of all of Ishiguro’s novels, with their investment in retrospection, memory, and the stifling forces of social convention.

⁷ Amit Marcus, “Narrative Ethics and Possible Worlds Theory: Toward a Rapprochement,” *Story Worlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 4 (2012): 99–122, 114. Further references embedded parenthetically in the text.

⁸ There is a long tradition in science-fiction criticism and Utopian studies regarding the classification schemes for utopia, dystopia, and anti-utopia. One of the most important interventions in the generic distinctions between utopia and dystopia is Lyman Tower Sargent’s oft-cited “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” *Utopian Studies* 5.1 (1994): 1–37 (further references embedded parenthetically in the text). Sargent distinguishes between two types of dystopia: “Some dystopias are deeply pessimistic.... But many dystopias are self-consciously warnings. A warning implies that choice, and

therefore hope, are still possible” (26). The latter type of dystopia is now called a “critical dystopia,” a “hopeful” version of the subgenre, which, according to Tom Moylan, “is built around the construction of a narrative of hegemonic order *and a counter-narrative of resistance*” (Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, “Dystopia and Histories,” introduction to *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* [New York: Routledge, 2003], 1–12, 5 [emphasis added]. Further references to Moylan/Baccolini embedded parenthetically in the text). A recent piece by Antonis Balasopoulos, “Anti-Utopia and Dystopia: Rethinking the Generic Field,” draws an extensive typology of anti-utopian and dystopian generic modes, in *Utopia Project Archive, 2006–2010*, ed. Vassilis Vlastaras (Athens: School of Fine Arts Publications, 2011), 59–67; further references to Balasopoulos embedded parenthetically in the text.

Moylan introduces the finer distinctions of “critical utopia” and “critical dystopia” in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1986), and *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000). (Further references embedded parenthetically in the text.) Moylan’s *Demand the Impossible* transforms the anodyne stereotype of utopia (“an image of society divested of the traces of conflict and antagonism,” in the words of Balasopoulos [60]), with the notion of the “critical utopia.” A critical utopia includes “a utopian society with its faults, inconsistencies, problems, and even denials of the utopian impulse in the form of the persistence of exploitation and domination in the better place” (Moylan, *Impossible* 44; qtd in Balasopoulos 60). Using Moylan’s definition, *Never Let Me Go* could be considered a critical utopia, given the focus on the “persistence of exploitation and domination” of the human clones, in the “better place” that is the society of “England, late 1990s,” which has cured “cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease,” and countless other human ailments (Ishiguro, *NLMG* 263). On the other hand, one could easily just characterize *NLMG* as a generic dystopia, lacking the “counter-narrative of resistance” and the “sense of hope” that a *critical* dystopian text would marshal to contest the oppressive status quo.

These generic labels and distinctions, then, can be contradictory, and more limited in their categorical emphasis than an analysis of the immanent textual elements might provide. For this reason, I largely sidestep the question of generic definition of Ishiguro’s novel, seeing that the novel’s generic commitments are hybrid and dynamic, and thus can hardly be contained by any one label. Indeed, even calling *NLMG* “science fiction” is problematic, as other critics have argued, given the lack of technological and scientific discourses in the novel—a typical interest of that genre. This novel has been controversial, not least because Ishiguro is not typically an author of science fiction, which is to say, his career and literary output are most often placed within the restricted field of literary production. (Case in point: the first four novels Ishiguro published each won prestigious prizes.) But it is not my main interest to specify how *Never Let Me Go* is or is not legitimate science fiction.

⁹ *The Island*, directed by Michael Bay (2005; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2013), DVD.

¹⁰ “Amazon.com Customer Discussions: *Never Let Me Go* Forum.” URL: www.amazon.com/Never-Let-Me-Go-Paperback/forum/Fx1GZ8EUJTB11C/-/1?_encoding=UTF8&asin=0307276473. Accessed 7 August 2013 and 28 February 2014.

Further references to individual comments or posts embedded parenthetically in the text.

¹¹ The concept of postmemory in the children of Holocaust survivors applies to Ishiguro’s cultural heritage as a child of Japanese survivors of the Nagasaki atomic bombing. There is also the U.S.’s neocolonialist control over post-War Japan. See Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29.1 (2008): 103–127.

¹² Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled* (1995; New York: Vintage, 1996). “Dream grammar” comes from Kazuo Ishiguro, “A Conversation About Life and Art with Kazuo Ishiguro,” interview with Cynthia F. Wong and Grace Crummett, in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 204–220, 209. Further references to this interview embedded parenthetically in the text.

¹³ Robbie G. H. Goh, “The Postclone-nial in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome*: Science and the Body in the Asian Diaspora,” *Ariel* 41.3–4 (2011): 45–71, 67–68. Further references embedded parenthetically.

¹⁴ James Wood, “Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*,” in *The Fun Stuff: And Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 30–38, 36. (Orig. appeared in *The New Republic* (May 2005).)

¹⁵ David Harvey, “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80.3 (September 1990): 418–34. Further page references to Harvey embedded parenthetically in the text.

¹⁶ Wai-chew Sim, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (London: Routledge, 2010), 83. Further citations embedded parenthetically in the text.

¹⁷ Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982; New York: Vintage, 1990); *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986; New York: Vintage, 1989).

¹⁸ The British Council, 2011. <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/kazuo-ishiguro>. Web. Accessed 29 September 2013. Further references to the British Council and Ishiguro’s “Author’s Note” on their website embedded parenthetically in the text.

¹⁹ I delve into the concept of double consciousness in the next section.

²⁰ Mark Currie, “Controlling Time: *Never Let Me Go*,” in *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes (London: Continuum, 2009), 91–103, 103. Further references to Currie embedded parenthetically in the text.

²¹ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5. Further references to Ngai embedded parenthetically in the text.

²² James Wood famously describes the novel’s tonal “husbanding of affects” (33). I see it as the spatializing of affects in order to mute or neutralize them. A key example of the narrative’s dampened affective repertoire is evident in the final scene, which I discuss below.

²³ Black discusses the inhuman aesthetic that Tommy’s art-making practice personifies and that the novel as a whole presents as the redemptive antithesis to its deceptive humanistic aesthetic, which serves only to protect the childhood of the “students,” but not their fate.

²⁴ Ngai would call this aesthetic economy a representation of blocked agency. But Ngai's focus on aesthetic affects would serve as an ulterior reading of this novel, though my interest is in the position of "blocked agency" itself as a structural figure, the misfit, within minoritarian literary representations of double exile.

²⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; New York: Simon & Shuster, 2005). Further quotations from Du Bois embedded parenthetically in the text.

²⁶ Kazuo Ishiguro, "The Art of Letting Go," interview with Nick James, *Sight and Sound* 21.3 (2011): 39.

²⁷ Black's influential essay, surprisingly, does not make the link between the humanistic discourse of souls and art in the novel, and the legacy of Du Bois, even though he highlights the novel's symbolic parallels with historical regimes of totalitarian control over bare life. But Black does hone in on the dialectic of humanism and anti-humanism implicit in the novel about the posthuman treated as spare parts. He writes, "If Romantic-inspired views of empathy rely on the claim that art reveals the human soul, Ishiguro's novel implies that the concept of the soul invokes a fundamentally exploitative discourse of use value. In this respect, *Never Let Me Go* shares in a pervasive late-twentieth-century cultural skepticism about the viability of empathetic art" (785). But he cautions that "Ishiguro's critique does not ... abandon the ethical potential of works of art. Instead, it makes a case for an ethics offering a very different approach to art and empathy that relies on the recognition of the inhuman. As an alternative to humanist modes of representation, Ishiguro's inhuman style suggests that only by recognizing what in ourselves is mechanical, manufactured, and replicated—in a traditional sense, not fully human—will we escape the barbarities committed in the name of preserving purely human life" (786). My reading of *NLMG* is informed by critic Sheng-mei Ma's critique of Ishiguro. Ma ties the theme of the oppressed minority in Ishiguro's work to the author's presumed politics of "post-ethnicity." She all but disparages Ishiguro for what she considers the author's desire to escape the entailments of racial and ethnic identity by symbolically wearing "white face." Sheng-mei Ma, "Kazuo Ishiguro's Persistent Dream for Postethnicity: Performance in Whiteface," *Post Identity* 2.1 (1999): n.p. Web. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.pid9999.0002.103>. Accessed 27 February 2014. Though I do not seek to evaluate—rather to analyze and understand—such a politically fraught position as bespeaking from the position of misfit minority, I am sympathetic to Ma's critique and discuss it further below in the conclusion.

²⁸ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). Further references to Gilroy embedded parenthetically in the text.

²⁹ Karl Shaddox, "Generic Considerations in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*," *Human Rights Quarterly* 35.2 (2013): 448–69, 451n9. Further references to Shaddox embedded parenthetically in the text. Shaddox's reading also explores *NLMG*'s generic parallels to slavery and abolitionist narratives, as I do in my reading of the novel as an allegory of the misfit minority position as represented by a geographical imagination. But Shaddox does not focus on the question of the "souls" of the clones and its parallel to the Du Boisian concept of double consciousness and Du Bois' humanistic antiracist argument against dehumanization.

³⁰ See especially Gilroy's Chapter on Du Bois, "'Cheer the Weary Traveller: W. E. B. Du Bois, Germany, and the Politics of (Dis)placement,'" for his reading of double consciousness as gesturing beyond the U.S. context in *The Souls* (111–45).

³¹ As Rebecca Walkowitz explains, "Ishiguro composes his novels with the knowledge that they will be published in several languages almost simultaneously. Since winning the Booker Prize in 1989, he has been an avid participant in international book tours, which he says have made him more self-conscious about the cultural and linguistic diversity of his readers [...]. Thinking about how and where his books will be read, Ishiguro claims, has led him to focus on '*shape, structure, and vision*,' or what he calls '*architecture*,' rather than on 'sentences' and 'phrases' " Rebecca Walkowitz, "Unimaginable Largeness: Kazuo Ishiguro, Translation, and the New World Literature," *Novel* 40.3 (2007): 216–39, 219; emphasis added. Further page references to Walkowitz are embedded in the text.

³² As many critics attest, and as David Palumbo-Liu writes, "*Never Let Me Go* merely gives the façade of science fiction" (David Palumbo-Liu, "Art: Foreign Exchange," in *The Deliverance of Others: Reading Literature in a Global Age* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2012], 96–132, 189). (Further references embedded parenthetically in the text.) Palumbo-Liu goes on to quote Brian McHale's "depiction of postmodern writers" to "illuminate Ishiguro's strategic deployment of science fiction elements": Ishiguro, in *NLMG*, "attends to [...] the ethics rather than the mechanisms of biotechnology" (189). In this, Palumbo-Liu argues, citing McHale, Ishiguro is like other "[p]ostmodernist writers [who] are more interested in the social and institutional consequences of technological innovation, the social arrangements these advances give rise to, rather than the innovations themselves" (McHale 3, qtd in Palumbo-Liu 189).

³³ Some of these spatial images, all of which take up literal space in the narrative, are related to others. As Paul de Man would say, given the inherent metaphoricity of language, some of these, it can be argued, are unreasonably stretched here, to yield a figurative significance that the implied author (or even the narrator) may not have intended. I am thinking here of de Man's opposition between grammar and rhetoric, or the figural versus the literal registers of language. See Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

³⁴ See also Shaddox (454–55) for a similar connection to Proust in the novel's deployment of memory as capable of melding time and space. The last chapter of *Du côté de chez Swann* (*Swann's Way*), appropriately titled "*Noms de pays: le nom*" ("Place-Names: the Name"), ends with the striking and similar fungibility of space and time, mediated by first-person narration and memory—in fact, determined by the "convenience" of personal memory and its effect on the present moment of remembering:

La réalité que j'avais connue n'existait plus. Il suffisait que Mme Swann n'arrivât pas toute pareille au même moment, pour que l'Avenue fût autre. Les lieux que nous avons connus n'appartiennent pas qu'au monde de l'espace où nous les situons pour plus de facilité. Ils n'étaient qu'une mince tranche au milieu d'impressions contigües qui formaient notre vie d'alors ; le souvenir d'une certaine image n'est que le regret d'un

certain instant ; et les maisons, les routes, les avenues, sont fugitives, hélas, comme les années. (Du côté de chez Swann 419–20)

The reality I had known no longer existed. That Mme. Swann did not arrive exactly the same at the same moment was enough to make the Avenue different. The places we have known do not belong solely to the world of space in which we situate them for our greater convenience. They were only a thin slice among contiguous impressions which formed our life at that time; the memory of a certain image is but regret for a certain moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fleeting, alas, as the years. (*Swann's Way*, Davis trans., 444)

In a February 1914 letter to Jacques Rivière (*Du côté de chez Swann*, 522n1), Proust notes how this surreal image is subjective and therefore provisional: a proposition of the fungibility of space and time, and the “fugitive” nature of spaces and places, which seem to move about as if animated in and of themselves, depending on the needs of the narrative subject in the present moment (“*Les lieux que nous avons connus n'appartiennent pas qu'au monde de l'espace où nous les situons pour plus de facilité*”).

³⁵ Norfolk is where Tommy finds the lost cassette tape with the title song “Never Let Me Go,” indicating how the novel equivocates as to the significance of believing in this humanistic, sentimental, myth—the dream of the lost corner, or of being able to defer donations. An alternate reading would say that finding the tape in Norfolk does not corroborate the childish magical thinking in space trumping the inexorable march of time; instead, it is the fact of stepping out of their appointed spaces—The Cottages—and into the “world out there” that allows for this magic to happen. The beauty of the indeterminacy of such loaded symbolic moments is what lends the book such an affective charge.

³⁶ A recent article by Matthew Eatough, “The Time that Remains: Organ Donation, Temporal Duration, and Bildung in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*,” *Literature and Medicine* 29.1 (2011): 132–160, serves to underscore the degree to which questions of time and temporal curtailment are central to the plot and thematics of the novel. Eatough’s take on the rhetoric of place and embodiment in the narrative is different from mine. For example, with regard to the body, he claims “the body functions as a concrete measure of time ... and not as an inherent component of the self” (134). By this he points to the organ-donation system and the state’s literal alienation of the clones’ bodies from them, for their bodies are meant only to serve as repositories of organs, and these bodies will only weaken before they are even middle-aged, as Miss Lucy says. Further, he claims that the novel’s genre of Bildungsroman turns on subjective dissociation from the body, or the clones’ personal cultivation of “affective indifference within individual subjects to their own bodies” (134). This is how Eatough explains Kathy’s self-control at the end of the story, and, more broadly, how the students never rebel: they have been trained to see their bodies as alien to them, and their relationship to their own bodies is one of *caring*—one that is not identical to the self. This is why, Eatough suggests, the carer role is so paramount—it doubles and formalizes the terms of this alienation, into two distinct and symbiotic roles: carer and

donor. See also Mark Currie, “Controlling Time: *Never Let Me Go*,” in *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, 91–103, for an even more extensive treatment of the fugitive and contradictory temporalities abetted by Ishiguro’s sophisticated use of narratorial strategies. Some of these strategies, like retroversion and anticipation, are nothing new; others, as Currie carefully taxonomizes them, are quite interesting. See, for instance, Currie’s notions of the novel’s deployment of narratorial temporal paradoxes, such as moments of “recollected anticipation,” and “remembered forgetfulness,” for a rich account of the novel’s web of narration and the masterful “control of time” by Ishiguro’s deceptively simple narrative.

³⁷ Ishiguro notably talks about the England that “never existed” that he depicts in *Remains of the Day*, the mythic England sold to global Anglophiles as a cultural export. Which is to say, Ishiguro, unlike many contemporary authors engaged in writing about empire—as *Remains* does, in depicting British fascism and imperial decline in the run-up to World War II—cares more about crafting symbolic universal claims that apply to any subaltern position, or any social position in general. Some critics view this as a way of passing for white, in Ma’s terms, but I read it as a way of delving into the complexities of collective identification, of subjects who abide by a code of conformity to social domination that is deeply problematic from the point of view of collective opposition and resistance.

³⁸ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963).

³⁹ For a more salutary take on abstracting identity and collectivity, for a dream of a common language of community, see Giorgio Agamben and his mysterious concept of the “coming community.” Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, tr. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁴⁰ Fredric Jameson, “Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?” *Science Fiction Studies* 9.2 (1982): 147–58, 153.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abel, Elizabeth. "Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys." *Contemporary Literature* 20.2 (1979): 155–77. Web.
- Abelove, Henry, Michèle A. Barale, and David M. Halperin, eds. *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. Tr. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Print.
- . *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998. Print.
- Alcoff, Linda Martín, Michael Hames-García, Satya P. Mohanty, and Paula M. L. Moya, eds. *Identity Politics Reconsidered*. New York: Palgrave, 2006. Print.
- Alvarez, A. "The Best Living English Novelist." *New York Times Book Review* (17 Mar. 1974): 6–7. Series I. Box 6, Jean Rhys Papers, McFarlin Lib., University of Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- "Amazon.com Customer Discussions: *Never Let Me Go* Forum." www.amazon.com/Never-Let-Me-Go-Paperback/forum/Fx1GZ8EUJTb1I1C/-/1?_encoding=UTF8&asin=0307276473. Accessed 28 Feb. 2014. Web.
- Anderson, Amanda. "Cryptonormativism and Double Gestures: The Politics of Poststructuralism." *Cultural Critique* 21 (1992): 63–95. Web.
- . *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. Print.
- Angier, Carole. *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1991. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 3rd. ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007. Print.
- Athill, Diana. Introduction. *Jean Rhys: The Collected Short Stories*. Ed. Athill. New York: Norton, 1987. vii–x. Print.
- . Introduction. *Jean Rhys: The Complete Novels*. Ed. Athill. New York: Norton, 1985. vii–xiv. Print.
- Baccolini, Raffaella and Tom Moylan. "Dystopia and Histories." Introduction to *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. Ed. Moylan and Baccolini. New York: Routledge, 2003. 1–12. Print.
- Balasopoulos, Antonis. "Anti-Utopia and Dystopia: Rethinking the Generic Field." *Utopia Project Archive, 2006–2010*. Ed. Vassilis Vlastaras. Athens: School of Fine Arts Publications, 2011. 59–67. Print.
- Baldwin, James. *Another Country*. 1960. New York: Vintage, 1993. Print.
- Baumeister, Roy F. *Escaping the Self: Alcoholism, Spirituality, Masochism, and Other Flights from the Burden of Selfhood*. New York: Harper, 1991. Print.
- . "Masochism as Escape from Self." *Journal of Sex Research* 25.1 (1988): 28–59. Web.
- Berg, James J. "Introduction: The American Isherwood." *Isherwood on Writing*. Ed. James J. Berg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. 1–33. Print.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.
- . "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)." *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2007): 754–80. Web.

- Bersani, Leo. *The Culture of Redemption*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990. Print.
- . *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. Print.
- . *Homos*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.
- . "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 3–30. Rpt. *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1988. 197–222. Print.
- . "Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject." *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2006): 161–74. Web.
- . "Sociability and Cruising." *UMBR(a)* 1 (2002): 9–23. Web.
- . "Sociality and Sexuality." *Critical Inquiry* 26.4 (2000): 641–56. Web.
- Bersani, Leo and Adam Phillips. *Intimacies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Print.
- Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus. "Surface Reading: An Introduction." "The Way We Read Now," Special Issue of *Representations* 108.1 (2009): 1–21. Web.
- Bewes, Timothy. *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994: 121–31. Print.
- Black, Shameem. "Ishiguro's Inhuman Aesthetics." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 55.4 (2009): 785–807. Web.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Tr. Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984. Print.
- . *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Tr. Susan Emanuel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996. Print.
- Braithwaite, Edward Kamau. *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean*. Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974. Print.
- . "A Post-Crutionary [*sic*] Tale of the Helen of Our Wars." *Wasafiri* 11.22 (1995): 69–78. Web.
- Bristow, Joseph. "'I am with You, Little Minority Sister': Isherwood's Queer Sixties." *The Queer Sixties*. Ed. Patricia Juliana Smith. New York: Routledge, 1999. 145–63. Print.
- The British Council. "Author's Note [Kazuo Ishiguro]." 2011. Accessed 29 Sept. 2013. Web.
- Bucknell, Katherine. "Who Is Christopher Isherwood?" *The Isherwood Century*. Ed. James J. Berg and Christopher Freeman. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. 13–30. Print.
- Butler, Judith. "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism.'" *Feminists Theorize the Political*. Ed. Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York: Routledge, 1992. 3–21. Print.
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Cameron, Sharon. *Impersonality: Seven Essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. Print.

- Carr, Jamie M. *Queer Times: Christopher Isherwood's Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Carter, Eunice. Review of *The Blacker the Berry* by Wallace Thurman. New York: Kraus, 1969. 162–63. Rpt from *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* 7 (May 1929).
- Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Tr. M. B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. Print.
- Caserio, Robert, et al. "Forum: Conference Debates. The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory." *PMLA* 121.3 (2006): 819–28. Print.
- Chatterjee, Niladri. "Guiding Star: Christopher Isherwood's Passage to Calcutta's Star Theatre" *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 21.2 (2008): 61–65. Web.
- Cheng, Anne A. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.
- Christman, John. "Autonomy, Self-Knowledge, and Liberal Legitimacy." *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*. Ed. Christman and Joel Anderson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 330–57. Print.
- Christman, John and Joel Anderson. Introduction. *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*. Ed. Christman and Anderson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 1–23. Print.
- Clukey, Amy. "Plantation Modernism: Irish, Caribbean, and American Fiction, 1890–1950." PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2009. Web.
- Cohen, Cathy J. "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Rpt. *GLQ* 3.4 (1997): 437–65. Print.
- Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement." *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. Ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith. New York: The Feminist Press, 1982. 13–22. Print.
- Currie, Mark. "Controlling Time: *Never Let Me Go*." *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes. London: Continuum, 2009. 91–103. Print.
- C.V.C., "Vivisection." Review of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, by Jean Rhys. *Daily Herald* (London) (12 Feb. 1931): np. Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 5, McFarlin Lib., University of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Print.
- Davis, Thadious M. "A Female Face: Or, Masking the Masculine in African American Fiction Before Richard Wright." *Teaching African American Literature: Theory and Practice*. Ed. Maryemma Graham, Sharon Pineault-Burke, and Marianna White Davis. New York: Routledge, 1998. 98–131. Print.
- de Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Print.
- Dean, Tim. "T. S. Eliot, Famous Clairvoyante." *Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in T. S. Eliot*. Ed. Cassandra Laity and Nancy K. Gish. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 43–65. Print.

- DeKoven, Marianne. "Psychoanalysis and Sixties Utopianism." *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 8.2 (2003): 263–72. Web.
- . *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Coldness and Cruelty." Tr. Jean McNeil. *Masochism*. New York: Zone Books, 1991. 9–138. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Tr. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Print.
- Dell'Amico, Carol. *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. "The Browsing Reader." Review of *The Blacker the Berry*, by Wallace Thurman. *Crisis* 36.7 (July 1929): 234, 249–50. Web.
- . *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. New York: Simon & Shuster, 2005. Print.
- Eatough, Matthew. "The Time that Remains: Organ Donation, Temporal Duration, and Bildung in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*." *Literature and Medicine* 29.1 (2011): 132–160. Web.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. Print.
- Edwards, Brent Hayes. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003. Print.
- Ellman, Maud. *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Pound*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988. Print.
- Emery, Mary Lou. *Jean Rhys at "World's End": Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. Print.
- . "The Poetics of Labor in Jean Rhys' Global Modernism." *Philological Quarterly* 90.2–3 (2011): 167–197. Web.
- Eng, David L., with J. Halberstam and José Muñoz. "Introduction: What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" Special Issue of *Social Text* 84–85 (2005): 1–17. Print.
- Eng, David L., David Kazanjian, and Judith Butler, eds. *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. Print.
- Esty, Jed. *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- Felski, Rita. "Context Stinks!" *New Literary History* 42.4 (2011): 573–91. Web.
- Fergusson, Roderick A. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. Print.
- Fisher, Philip. *The Vehement Passions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002. Print.
- Fisher, Rudolph. *The Walls of Jericho*. 1928. Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer Company, 1992. Print.
- . "The City of Refuge." *The Atlantic Monthly* (Feb. 1925).
- Ford, Madox Ford. "Preface: Rive Gauche." Jean Rhys, *The Left Bank and Other Stories*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1927. 7–27. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Tr. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave, 2008. Print.

- . *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality, Volume 3*. Tr. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1986. Print.
- . "Friendship as a Way of Life." 1981. *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Vol. 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*. Tr. John Johnson. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: The Free Press, 1997. 135–40. Print.
- . *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982–1983*. Tr. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave, 2010. Print.
- . *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. 1978. Tr. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990. Print.
- . *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*. Tr. Graham Burchell. New York: Picador, 2007. Print.
- . "Society Must Be Defended": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*. Tr. David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003. Print.
- . *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*. Tr. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1985. Print.
- . "What Is An Author?" 1969. *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Vol. 2: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Tr. Josué V. Harari. Ed. James D. Faubion. New York: The Free Press, 1998. 205–22. Print.
- Fulton (Casey), Nancy J. "Jean Rhys and the 'Liberated' Woman in the Later Short Fiction." *Revista / Review Interamericana* 4 (Summer 1974): 264–72. Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 5, McFarlin Lib., University of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Print.
- "Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Exterminating the White Cockroach." *Revista / Review Interamericana* (Fall 1974): 340–49. Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 5, McFarlin Lib., University of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Print.
- Frye, Marilyn. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983. Print.
- Future of Minority Studies Research Project. Cornell University. fmsproject.cornell.edu. Web. Accessed 2 May 2014.
- Gaither, Renou W. "The Moment of Revision: A Reappraisal of Wallace Thurman's Aesthetics in *The Blacker the Berry* and *Infants of the Spring*." *College Language Association Journal* 37.1 (1993): 81–93. Web.
- Garber, Linda. *Identity Poetics: Race, Class, and the Lesbian-Feminist Roots of Queer Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. Print.
- Ganter, Granville. "Decadence, Sexuality, and the Bohemian Vision of Wallace Thurman." *New Voices of the Harlem Renaissance: Essays on Race, Gender, and Literary Discourse*. Ed. Australia Tarver and Paula C. Barnes. Madison, WI: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006. 194–213. Print.
- Garnes, David. "A Single Man, Then and Now." *The Isherwood Century: Essays on the Life and Work of Christopher Isherwood*. Ed. James J. Berg and Christopher Freeman. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. 196–202. Print.
- Ghent, Emmanuel. "Masochism, Submission, Surrender." *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 26.1 (1990): 108–36. Web.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.

- Goffman, Erving. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963. Print.
- Goh, Robbie G. H. "The Postclone-nial in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*: Science and the Body in the Asian Diaspora." *Ariel* 41.3-4 (2011): 45-71. Web.
- Haizlip, Shirlee Taylor. Introduction. Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*. New York: Scribner, 1996. 9-15. Print.
- Halberstam, J. Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.
- . "Shame and White Masculinity." "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" Special Issue of *Social Text* 84-85 (2005): 219-34. Print.
- Hall, Radclyffe. *The Well of Loneliness*. 1928. New York: Anchor Books, 1990. Print.
- Halley, Janet. *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. Print.
- Hallstein, D. Lynn O'Brien. Review of *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*, by Janet Halley. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 12.2 (2009): 329-32. Web.
- Hames-García, Michael. "Queer Theory Revisited." *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 19-45. Print.
- Hames-García, Michael, and Ernesto Javier Martínez, eds. *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.
- Hames-García, Michael, and Paula M. L. Moya, eds. *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. Print.
- Halperin, David M. *What Do Gay Men Want? An Essay on Sex, Risk, and Subjectivity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2007. Print.
- Hardwick, Elizabeth. "Sex and the Single Man." Review of *A Single Man*, by Christopher Isherwood. *The New York Review of Books* 3.1 (Aug. 1964): 4. Web.
- Harvey, David. "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80.3 (1990): 418-34. Web.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today* 29.1 (2008): 103-127. Web.
- Holland, Sharon Patricia. *The Erotic Life of Racism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. Print.
- Hooker, Evelyn. "The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual." *Journal of Projective Techniques* 21 (1957): 18-31. Web. Accessed 31 Aug. 2011.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea*. New York: Knopf, 1945. Print.
- . *Fine Clothes to the Jew*. New York: Knopf, 1927. Print.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*. Paris: Minuit, 1977. Print.
- . *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Tr. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985. Print.
- Isherwood, Christopher. *The Berlin Stories*. 1945. New York: New Directions, 1954. Print.
- . *Christopher and His Kind*. 1976. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. Print.

- . "First Draft [*Christopher and His Kind*]." 1973–1974. TS. Christopher Isherwood Papers CI 1030, Huntington Lib., California.
- . *Goodbye to Berlin*. 1939. *The Berlin Stories*. New York: New Directions, 1954. Print.
- . *Isherwood on Writing*. Ed. James J. Berg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. Print.
- . *The Last of Mr Norris*. 1935. *The Berlin Stories*. New York: New Directions, 1954. Print.
- . *Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties*. 1938. Norfolk: New Directions, 1947. Print.
- . *My Guru and His Disciple*. New York: Farrar, 1980. Print.
- . *A Single Man*. 1964. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. Print.
- . "Unused Chapter [*Christopher and His Kind*]." 1973–1974. TS. Christopher Isherwood Papers CI 1029a, Huntington Lib., California.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. "The Art of Letting Go." Interview with Nick James. *Sight and Sound* 21.3 (2011): 39. Web.
- . *An Artist of the Floating World*. 1986. New York: Vintage, 1989. Print.
- . "A Conversation About Life and Art with Kazuo Ishiguro." Interview with Cynthia F. Wong and Grace Crummett. *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*. Ed. Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008. 204–220. Print.
- . "'For Me, England Is a Mythical Place.'" Interview with Tim Adams. *The Guardian* (19 Feb. 2005): 2. Web. Accessed 19 June 2013.
- . "'I'm Sorry I Can't Say More': An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro." With Sean Matthews. *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes. London: Continuum, 2009. 114–25. Print.
- . *Never Let Me Go*. London: Faber, 2005. Print.
- . *Never Let Me Go*. New York: Random House, 2005. Print.
- . *Never Let Me Go*. New York: Vintage, 2006. Print.
- . *A Pale View of Hills*. 1982. New York: Vintage, 1990. Print.
- . *The Unconsoled*. 1995. New York: Vintage, 1996. Print.
- . *The Island*. 2005. Dir. Michael Bay. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2013. DVD.
- Jaising, Shakti. "Who Is Christophine? The Good Black Servant and the Contradictions of (Racial) Liberalism." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 56.4 (2010): 815–36. Web.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981. Print.
- . *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991. Print.
- . "Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?" *Science Fiction Studies* 9.2 (1982): 147–58. Web.
- Jarraway, David. "Tales of the City: Marginality, Community, and the Problem of (Gay) Identity in Wallace Thurman's 'Harlem' Fiction." *College English* 65.1 (2002): 36–52. Web.
- Johnson, E. Patrick, and Mae G. Henderson, eds. *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Print.

- Johnson, James Weldon. *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*. 1912. New York: Knopf, 1927. Print.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. "Transformed Nonconformists." Nov. 1954. Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project. 195–98. Web.
- Kucich, John. *Imperial Masochism: British Fiction, Fantasy, and Social Class*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. Print.
- Larsen, Nella. "Quicksand" and "Passing." Ed. Deborah E. McDowell. 1928, 1929. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986.
- Latour, Bruno. "Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 225–48. Web.
- . *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.
- Lewis, Andrea. "Immigrants, Prostitutes, and Chorus Girls: National Identity in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 6.2 (1999): 82–95. Web.
- Lewis, David Levering. *When Harlem Was In Vogue*. New York: Knopf, 1981. Print.
- Lewis, Theophilus. "Wallace Thurman is a Model Harlemit." *The Amsterdam News* (c. 1930): n.p. Wallace Thurman Papers, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Lib., Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Print.
- Lilly, Mark. *Gay Men's Literature in the Twentieth Century*. New York: New York University Press, 1993. Print.
- Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*. 1925. New York: Touchstone Books, 1992. Print.
- Love, Heather K. "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn." *New Literary History* 41.2 (2010): 371–91. Web.
- . "Compulsory Happiness and Queer Existence." *New Formations* 63 (2008): 52–64. Web.
- . *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- . "Gay Shame Redux." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association (12 Oct. 2006). TS. 1–16. Email communication.
- Lugones, María. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System." *Hypatia* 22.1 (2007): 186–209. Web.
- Luibhéid, Eithne and Lionel Cantú, Jr., eds. *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. Print.
- Ma, Sheng-mei. "Kazuo Ishiguro's Persistent Dream for Postethnicity: Performance in Whiteface." *Post Identity* 2.1 (1999): n.p. Web. Accessed 27 Feb. 2014.
- Marcus, Amit. "Narrative Ethics and Possible Worlds Theory: Toward a Rapprochement." *Story Worlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 4 (2012): 99–122. Web.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. Tr. Marcuse and Erica Sherover. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978. Print.
- . *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. 1966. Boston: Beacon, 1975. Print.

- Martin, Carolyn ("Biddy"). "Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias." *Diacritics* 24.2–3 (1994): 104–21. Web.
- McKay, Claude. *Home to Harlem*. 1928. New York: Northeastern University Press, 1987. Print.
- Mellown, Elgin W. *Jean Rhys: A Descriptive and Annotated Bibliography of Works and Criticism*. New York: Garland, 1984. Print.
- Mohanty, Satya P. "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition." *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993): 41–80. Web.
- Moran, Patricia. *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma*. New York: Palgrave, 2007. Print.
- Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature." *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54–68. Web.
- Mouffe, Chantal. *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso, 2000. Print.
- Moya, Paula M. L. "Introduction: Reclaiming Identity." *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*. Ed. Moya and Michael Hames-García. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. 1–26. Print.
- Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. New York: Methuen, 1986. Print.
- . *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000. Print.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. Print.
- Nagarajan, S. "Christopher Isherwood and the Vedantic Novel: A Study of *A Single Man*." *Ariel* 3.4 (1972): 63–71. Web.
- Naipaul, V. S. "Without a Dog's Chance." Review of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, by Jean Rhys. *The New York Review of Books* (18 May 1972): np. Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 5, McFarlin Lib., University of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Print.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*. Tr. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991. Print.
- Nealon, Christopher. *Foundlings: Gay and Lesbian Historical Emotion Before Stonewall*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. Print.
- Nebeker, Helen. *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage: A Critical Study of the Novels of Jean Rhys*. Montreal, QC: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1981. Print.
- Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005. Print.
- Nugent, Richard Bruce. Letter to Dorothy Peterson. MS, n.d. The Wallace Thurman Papers, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Lib., Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
- Nyong'o, Tavia. "Brown Punk: Kalup Linzy's Musical Anticipations." *TDR: The Drama Review* 54.3 (2010): 71–86. Web.
- Palumbo-Liu, David. "Art: Foreign Exchange." *The Deliverance of Others: Reading Literature in a Global Age*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. 96–132. Print.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982. Print.

- Pérez, Hiram. "You Can Have My Brown Body Too." "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" Special Issue of *Social Text* 84–85 (2005): 171–92. Print.
- Proust, Marcel. 1913, 1919. *Du côté de chez Swann*. Paris: Pléiade, Gallimard, 1987. Print.
- . *Swann's Way*. Tr. Lydia Davis. New York: Penguin, 2002. Print.
- Raiskin, Judith. *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Print.
- Ramchand, Kenneth. Introduction. Jean Rhys, *Tales of the Wide Caribbean*. London: Heinemann, 1985: np. Print.
- Reid-Pharr, Robert. *Black Gay Man: Essays*. New York: New York University Press, 2001. Print.
- Rhys, Jean. *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*. New York: Knopf, 1931. Print.
- . "The Black Exercise Book." Unpublished MS, n.d., 59pp, np. Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 1, McFarlin Lib., University of Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- . *The Early Novels*. London: André Deutsch, 1984. Print.
- . "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose." *Sleep It Off Lady*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1976. Rpt. *The New Yorker* 52 (30 Aug. 1976): 26–27. Print.
- . "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose." TS. Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 3, McFarlin Lib., University of Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- . *Good Morning, Midnight*. London: Constable, 1939. Print.
- . Interview with Virginia Browne-Wilkinson. TS. BBC Radio Programme, "Women's Hour." (Recorded 30 Jan. 1967). Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 2, McFarlin Lib., Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- . *Jean Rhys: The Collected Short Stories*. Ed. Diana Athill. New York: Norton, 1987. Print.
- . *Jean Rhys: The Complete Novels*. Ed. Diana Athill. New York: Norton, 1985. Print.
- . *The Left Bank and Other Stories*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1927. Print.
- . "Let Them Call It Jazz." *Tigers Are Better-Looking*. 1962. New York: Harper & Row, 1974. 47–67. Print.
- . *Quartet*. 1929. New York: Norton, 1997. Print.
- . *Sleep It Off Lady*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1976. Print.
- . *Tigers Are Better Looking*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974. Print.
- . "Triple Sec." [Unpublished Draft of *Voyage in the Dark*.] TS. Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 5, McFarlin Lib., University of Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- . *Voyage in the Dark*. 1934. New York: Norton, 1982. Print.
- . *Wide Sargasso Sea*. London: André Deutsch, 1966. Print.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. Ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle A. Barale, and David M. Halperin. New York: Routledge, 1994. 227–54. Print.
- Robbins, Bruce. "Cruelty is Bad: Banality and Proximity in *Never Let Me Go*." *Novel* 40.3 (2007): 289–302. Web.
- Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. 1982. New York: Bantam, 1983. Print.
- Rubin, Gayle S. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Ed. Carole S. Vance. London: Pandora. 1992. 267–93. Print.

- . "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. Ed. Rayna Reiter. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975. 157–209. Print.
- Sargent, Lyman Tower. "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited." *Utopian Studies* 5.1 (1994): 1–37. Web.
- Savory, Elaine. *Jean Rhys*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.
- . "Jean Rhys, Race and Caribbean / English Criticism." *Wasafiri* 14.28 (1998): 33–34. Web.
- Scott, Joan W. "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* 17.4 (1991): 773–97. Web.
- Scott III, Daniel M. "Harlem Shadows: Re-Evaluating Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry*." *MELUS* 29.3–4 (2004): 323–39. Web.
- Schmidt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. 1932. Tr. George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. Print.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. Print.
- . "How To Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys." *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. 154–64. Print.
- . Introduction. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. 1–25. Print.
- . "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. 123–52. Print.
- Shaddox, Karl. "Generic Considerations in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*." *Human Rights Quarterly* 35.2 (2013): 448–69. Web.
- Shepherd, Reginald. "An Interview with Chad Parmenter." *American Poetry Review* 37.5 (2008): 11–13. Web.
- Silverman, Kaja. *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Sim, Wai-chew. *Kazuo Ishiguro*. London: Routledge, 2010. Print.
- Simmel, Georg. "The Stranger." 1908. *On Individuality and Social Forms*. Tr. Donald N. Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971. 143–49. Print.
- Singh, Amritjit. "Introduction: Wallace Thurman and the Harlem Renaissance." *The Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman: A Harlem Renaissance Reader*. Ed. Singh and Daniel M. Scott, III. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003. 1–27. Print.
- Singh, Amritjit and Daniel M. Scott, III, eds. *The Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman: A Harlem Renaissance Reader*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003. Print.
- Snediker, Michael D. *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print.
- Spitzer, Robert L. "Homosexuality and Civil Rights: Position Statement." American Psychiatric Association. Dec. 1973. Web. Accessed 31 Aug. 2011.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. 271–316. Print.

- . "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." *In Other Worlds: Essays In Cultural Politics*. 1985. New York: Routledge, 1988. 197–221. Print.
- . "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *"Race," Writing, and Difference*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. 262–80. Print.
- Stouk, Jordan. "Alternative Narratives of Race, Time and Gender." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 3.1 (1995): 53–59. Web.
- Summers, Claude. Foreword. Christopher Isherwood, *Isherwood on Writing*. Ed. James J. Berg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. vii–xv. Print.
- Thurman, Wallace. *The Blacker the Berry ... A Novel of Negro Life*. 1929. New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969. Print.
- . "Cordelia the Crude." *Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists*. Ed. Wallace Thurman. 1926. New York: The Fire!! Press, 1990. 5–6. Print.
- . "Fire Burns: A Department of Comment." *Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists*. Ed. Wallace Thurman. 1926. New York: The Fire!! Press, 1990. 47–48. Print.
- . *Infants of the Spring*. 1932. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992. Print.
- . "Negro Artists and the Negro." *The New Republic* 52 (Aug. 31, 1927): 37–39. Web.
- . "This Negro Literary Renaissance." *The Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman: A Harlem Renaissance Reader*. Ed. Amritjit Singh and Daniel M. Scott, III. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003. 247–49. Print.
- . "Nephews of Uncle Remus." *The Independent* 119 (Sept. 1927): 297–98. Web.
- . "Notes on a Stepchild." TS, n.d. [April to September 1929]. The Wallace Thurman Papers, Box 1, Folder 11, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Lib., Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
- Thurman, Wallace and William Jourdan Rapp. *Harlem: A Melodrama of Negro Life*. 1928. *The Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman: A Harlem Renaissance Reader*. Ed. Amritjit Singh and Daniel M. Scott, III. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003. 306–69. Print.
- Tongues Untied*. 1989. Dir. Marlon Riggs. Culver City, CA: Strand Releasing, 2008. DVD.
- Van Vechten, Carl. *Nigger Heaven*. 1926. New York: Farrar, 1980. Print.
- Vaz Díaz, Selma. Teleplay adaptation of *Good Morning, Midnight* by Jean Rhys. BBC Radio, Third Programme (May 1957). TS. Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 5, McFarlin Lib., University of Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- Walker, Daniel. "Exploding the Canon: A Re-Examination of Wallace Thurman's Assault on the Harlem Renaissance" *Western Journal of Black Studies* 22.3 (1998): 153–58. Web.
- Walkowitz, Rebecca. *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. Print.
- . "Unimaginable Largeness: Kazuo Ishiguro, Translation, and the New World Literature." *Novel* 40.3 (2007): 216–39. Web.
- Warner, Michael. Introduction. *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Ed. Warner. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. vii–xxxi. Print.

- . *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. New York: The Free Press, 1999. Print.
- West, Dorothy. "Elephant's Dance: A Memoir of Wallace Thurman." *Black World* 20.1 (Nov. 1970): 77–85. Web.
- West, Rebecca. "The Pursuit of Misery in Some of the New Novels." Review of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, by Jean Rhys. *The Daily Telegraph* (30 Jan. 1931). Jean Rhys Papers, Series I. Box 5, McFarlin Lib., University of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Print.
- White, Edmund. *A Boy's Own Story*. New York: Plume, 1982. Print.
- . "A Tale of Two Kitties." Review of *Isherwood: A Life Revealed*, by Peter Parker. *Times Literary Supplement* (4 Jun. 2004): 3–4. Web.
- White, Walter. *The Fire in the Flint*. 1924. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.
- . *Flight*. 1926. New York: Louisiana State University Press, 1998. Print.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Long Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961. Print.
- . "Structures of Feeling." *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. 128–35. Print.
- Williams, Raymond and Michael Orrom. *Preface to Film*. London: Film Drama, 1954. Print.
- Wood, James. "Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*," review of *Never Let Me Go*, by Kazuo Ishiguro. *The Fun Stuff: And Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, 2012. 30–38. Rpt. *The New Republic* (May 2005). Print.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. 1925. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1990. Print.
- Wyndham, Francis. Introduction. Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. New York: Norton, 1982. 5–12. Print.