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Creole Modernism: Gender, Race, and Intimacy in the Transatlantic

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Comparative Literature

by

Rose Emily DuCharme

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Eyal Amiran, Chair
Professor Virginia Jackson
Professor Emerita Carrie J. Noland

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

VITA vi

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION vii

INTRODUCTION: Creole Modernism and the Creole in Theory 1

Creole/Créole
Creole Modernism
Creolization in Theory
Intimate Geographies
Gendering and Queering the Creole
Chapter Overview

CHAPTER 1: The "Eternal Feminine" of New Orleans and the Creole United States 42

The "Eternal Feminine" Landscape and the Spectacularized Spectral Feminine Creole
Constructions of the Creole Region in New Orleans Regionalism
Dunbar-Nelson's Queering of the Tragic Creole at the Carnival Ball

CHAPTER 2: The Gendering of French Antillean Modernity: The "Female-Isle" and the "Plant-Man," Or from *Doudouism* to *Négritude* 102

The "female-isle": Drasta Houël's *Doudouism* and the Feminine Floral Erotic
The "Plant-Man" and *Négritude*'s Re-Gendering of Nature
Claire-Solange, the Creole Family Romance, and the Possibility of a Feminine *Négritude*

CHAPTER 3: Suspending the *Voyage*: Jean Rhys's Creole Feminine Geography 167

Voyage in the Dark: Queer Migrations and the Geography of the Metropole
The Queer Fantasy of Black Femininity
The "Left Bank" of the Island: Locating the Antilles in France

CHAPTER 4: Claude McKay's Queer Creole Poetics 222

Creole Poetics and the Politics of Dialect
Songs of Jamaica and *Constab Ballads*: Queer Creole Poetics and the Police
Policing, Gender, and Sexuality in McKay's Queer Narratives
Colonial Surveillance and Sexual Violence in *Banana Bottom*

CONCLUSION 265

WORKS CITED 267

APPENDIX: *Créoleries* by Drasta Houël, Translated by Rose DuCharme 276

Que ou vle… Que ou pas vle ou Le Pont d'amour / If you want it… If you don't want it Or The Bridge of Love
Chacun son tou / Each Has Their Turn
Adieu bonheu' ! / Goodbye Happiness!
Philtre d'amour / Love Potion
Mieux sé vo mô / Better to die!

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Creole Modernism: Gender, Race, and Intimacy in the Transatlantic

by

Rose Emily DuCharme

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Irvine, 2024

Professor Eyal Amiran, Chair

This project seeks to define and interrogate the concept of creole modernism through a reading of works by creole-identified writers from the early twentieth century across the Francophone and Anglophone transatlantic. *Creole* is a term that comes from the history of colonialism and slavery, originally meaning a person born in the Americas. Various definitions of *creole* provide a racial classification, but these definitions are inconsistent and contradictory, demonstrating that evocations of the creole index racialization without identifying a specific racial identity. By tracing the figure of the creole as a literary representation, from a more traditional regionalism to a modernist ambiguity, I examine how the creole is defined through the overdetermination of racial significations, and thus it is always racialized. I consider examples of creolization in the sites of New Orleans, the French Antilles, Dominica, and Jamaica, as well as the ways in which these spaces extend into the colonial metropoles of Paris and London. My readings of creole modernism include Alice Dunbar-Nelson's short fiction, Drasta Houël's poetry, Suzanne Lacascade's novel *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, Jean Rhys' novel *Voyage in the Dark* and her short fiction, and Claude McKay's Jamaican poetry, short fiction, and his novel *Banana Bottom*. In assessing the representational and ideological function of the creole figure across the transatlantic, I employ a methodological "creolization of theory," engaging in a

dialogue between scholars in feminism and queer studies, postcolonial studies, Black studies and critical race theory, and modernist studies. I argue that the creole is not only fundamental to the structure of modernism as a site of rupture, ambiguity, and forced innovation, but also that representations of the creole signify racialized femininity and are rendered categorically queer through the projections of deviant sexuality and feminized excess implied in the creole's formation. As a figure engendered through the historical hauntings of colonization and slavery, the creole occupies an ambivalent relation to structures of imperial and national power. It is a figure of fluidity and mobility that demonstrates the porosity of categories and transgresses geographical borders. While not always presenting a revolutionary challenge to the imperial system, the creole nevertheless undermines and resists the stability of classificatory logics.

INTRODUCTION

Creole Modernism and the Creole in Theory

This project seeks to define and identify "creole modernism" as a phenomenon, while also recognizing the limitations and contingencies of any definitional claim.[1] In tracing the figure of the creole as a literary representation, from a more traditional realism and regionalism to a modernist figure of ambiguity, I examine how the creole is defined through the overdetermination of racial significations, and thus it is always a racialized figure while never being classifiable as a single racial identity. My dissertation analyzes the figural, symbolic, and representational construction and deployment of the *creole* across a variety of English- and French-language modernist and pre-modernist literary texts ranging from Reconstruction-era United States poetics to novels published by transnational Caribbean writers through the 1930s.[2] In assessing the representational and ideological function of the creole across French, British, United States, and Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean contexts, I use a methodological "creolization of theory," engaging in a dialogue between scholars across disciplines including queer and feminist studies, postcolonial studies, Black studies, and critical race theory, and modernist studies in literature.[3]

---

[1] The term "creole modernism" has been previously used in scholarship on the writing of Jean Rhys by Christopher GoGwilt, Ankhi Mukherjee, and H. Adlai Murdoch. I acknowledge and credit their use of this term as I am expanding its application beyond this context.

[2] This includes usage of Creole-inflected language in texts otherwise written in Standard English and French. It is important to note that my dissertation is *not* a study of Creole-language literature, and because I am not a speaker of any Creole language, I lack the linguistic competence to undertake such a study. Instead, I am interested in the presence of Creole-inflected language in Standard English and French-language texts in ways that both challenges the legibility of these texts and allows for indications of Creole language to be legible to non-Creole speaking audiences.

[3] In the Introduction to *The Creolization of Theory*, Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet define creolization as a theoretical concept and methodological approach: "As a concept creolization is simultaneously descriptive and analytical: it emerges from the experiential but provides a theoretical framework that does justice to the lived realities of subaltern subjects, while explaining their experiences in terms of an epistemology that remains connected to those realities. Creolization indexes flexibility, welcomes the test of reality, and is a mode of theorizing that is integral to the living practices of being and knowing. It is a mode shared by all cultures in contact. A foundational

The geographical scope of my project is to examine creolization at the sites of New Orleans, the French Antilles, Dominica, and Jamaica, as well as the ways in which these spaces extend into the metropoles of Paris and London.[4] It is a feature of modernist migrations and mobility that the creole, a figure whose identity is forged in the colonial periphery, returns to occupy the metropole. I examine the creole modernism of a selection of Anglophone and Francophone writers located at these sites: Alice Dunbar-Nelson (New Orleans), Drasta Houël (Martinique and Paris), Suzanne Lacascade (Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Paris), Jean Rhys (Dominica, London, and Paris), and Claude McKay (Jamaica, Harlem, London, Marseilles). Many of the writers I discuss had transnational careers, from the Afro-Creole poets in nineteenth-century Louisiana who traveled to Paris for their education, to the twentieth-century Caribbean writers who spent their adult lives in permanent exile or expatriation in London and Paris.[5] McKay's career enacts a circuit of return to the US after a period spent in France and Morocco due to the British government prohibiting his return to its territories, thereby forcing him into permanent exile from Jamaica. In examining the works of these writers, I argue that the

theoretical concept, it thus emerges from a productive engagement with the living dynamics of an uneven but interdependent world" (2). In *European Others*, Fatima El-Tayeb defines her methodology as a "creolization of theory" in Shih and Lionnet's terms by working between theories of race and migration and queer theory. I follow these scholars in my methodological approach, while keeping in mind the historical specificity of creolization that Shih and Lionnet maintain, that creolization "registers the history of slavery, plantation culture, colonization, settlement, forced migration, and most recently the uneven global circulation of labor" (24-5).

[4] Through Claude McKay's writing, my project also extends into New York and suggests further potential in examining a creole presence in the Harlem Renaissance. I have allocated less attention to McKay's representation of Harlem, however, because during the early twentieth century, New York was not the imperial center governing Jamaica and thus did not occupy the same position as London and Paris. The US was albeit involved in colonial projects in the Caribbean, notably in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Haiti, the Virgin Islands, and the Panama Canal Zone. In the nineteenth century New Orleans regionalist literature I discuss in Chapter One, New Orleans is projected in a dependent colonial relation to Paris (at least for the Francophone Afro-Creole writers of this era). In Anglophone literature of New Orleans, the United States does occupy an imperial position, but this is more governed by the idea of the nation rather than a specific metropole, as New Orleans was already established as a cosmopolitan urban space at the time that the Louisiana Territory was integrated into the US.

[5] Houël, Lacascade, and Rhys all spent their adult lives in Europe (France in the case of Houël and Lacascade and Britain in the case of Rhys), never returning to the islands where they were due to a combination of economic and personal circumstances. Houël migrated to Paris after Saint-Pierre, Martinique, where her family was from, was leveled by a catastrophic eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902.

creole is not only fundamental to the structure of modernism as a site of rupture, ambiguity, and forced innovation, but also that representations of the creole signify racialized femininity and are categorically queer through evocations of deviant sexuality and feminized excess implied by this concept. As a figure engendered through the historical hauntings of colonization and slavery, the creole occupies an ambivalent relation to structures of imperial and national power. It is a figure of fluidity and mobility that demonstrates the porosity of categories and the transgression of geographical borders. While not always presenting a revolutionary challenge to the imperial system, the creole nevertheless undermines and resists the stability of classificatory logics.

Creole / Créole

In a definition from 1917 that posits the figure of the creole's function to problematize categories of identity, Alice Dunbar Nelson succinctly captures the multivalent racial meanings of the term "creole" in the context of Louisiana in the early twentieth century:

> It is in the definition of the word Creole that another great difficulty arises. The native white Louisianian will tell you that a Creole is a white man, whose ancestors contain some French or Spanish blood in their veins, but he will be disputed by others, who will gravely tell you that Creoles are to be found only in the lower Delta lands of the state, that there are no Creoles north of New Orleans and will raise their hands in horror at the idea of being confused with the "Cajuns," the descendants of those Nova Scotians whom Longfellow immortalized in *Evangeline*. Sifting down the mass of conflicting definitions, it appears that to a Caucasian, a Creole is a native of the lower parishes of Louisiana in whose veins some traces of Spanish, West Indian or French blood runs. The Caucasian will shudder with horror at the idea of including a person of color in the definition, and the person of color will retort with his definition that a Creole is a native of Louisiana, in whose blood runs mixed strains of everything un-American, with the African strain slightly apparent.[6]

By applying the term *creole* to both a European-American and a person of color, Dunbar-Nelson's definition indicates that *creole* evokes the intimately related histories of Europe's

[6] Dunbar Nelson's essay *People of Color in Louisiana* was originally published in 1917 in *Journal of Negro History*.

colonization of the Americas and transatlantic slavery. From *creole*'s original meaning, in the context of colonialism, as a person who is born in the Americas (as opposed to Europe), to its connotations of racial mixing that could encompass indigenous, African, and European identities, the *creole* is inextricable from the violent processes of transatlantic colonialism and slavery that generated the clashes and conflicts inherent in this term. As this 1917 definition demonstrates, these contradictions generated through slavery and colonialism were understood when this term and the concept were carried into early twentieth century modernity.

When considered from a contemporary perspective, various academic and theoretical definitions of *creole* negotiate the violent history of colonialism or the revolutionary potential of hybridity in the postcolonial era. For example, in the introduction to *Creolizing Europe*, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Shirley Anne Tate define the Hispanophone Latin American usage of the term *creole* (*criollo*) through elitism, exclusion, and its perpetuation of the colonial order when used to reference the white colonial society.[7] According to Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Tate, "this model introduced an ethnic and racialized social order and socio-economic structure in which 'criollo' meant the 'new elites,' largely descendants of White Spanish colonizers" (3-4). While my dissertation does not concern Hispanophone contexts for the usage of the term *creole*, it is important to acknowledge the important (and in some cases divergent) history in the usage of this term in Spanish and Portuguese colonial contexts in Latin America. While acknowledging these contexts, my focus will be on the Anglophone and Francophone meanings and associations of *creole* in North America and the Caribbean.

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[7] "Latin American *criollismo* mutated into an ideology of exclusion by the early twentieth century. On this basis a citizenship model of insiders and outsiders to the nation was developed, serving to demarcate supposedly 'non-Creole' collective identities and exclude them from citizenship rights, as was the case for the indigenous and African heritage populations. Such postcolonial ideological elaboration of the concept of 'criolloismo' was characteristic of mainland Ibero-America and the Hispanic Caribbean" (Alberro, 1992).

Rather than examining the *criollo* in the context of Spanish colonialism, I focus on the particularity of this term in English- and French- language contexts which maps onto locations that were historically colonized for the establishment of slave plantations.[8] Historian Michel Trouillot emphasizes the centrality of slavery in structuring the social order in the Caribbean Islands and the US Deep South:

> Slavery was at least as significant to the daily life of Brazilian and Caribbean societies as to U.S. society as a whole. The British and French sugar islands in particular, from seventeenth-century Barbados and Jamaica to eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue and Martinique, were not simply societies that had slaves: they were *slave societies*. Slavery defined their economic, social, and cultural organization: it was their raison d'être. The people who lived there, free or not, lived there because there were slaves. The northern equivalent would be for the whole continental United States to look like the state of Alabama at the peak of its cotton career. (17-18)[9]

Beginning my readings of creole literature after slavery, my dissertation traces how the remainders and residues of this history enter into discourses of modernism and modernity through the figure of the creole.[10]

To complicate critiques that understand the white creole as the bearer of an elite racial status in colonial societies, in *Creole America,* Sean Goudie defines *creole* in relation to a

---

[8] Québec, for example, doesn't share in the history of Creole identity in the way that the other North American and Caribbean French colonial societies in Louisiana, Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guyana do. The importance of the historical residue of the slave plantation economy justifies my inclusion of particular sites in the Francophone and Anglophone Americas (namely the Caribbean and the US South), as opposed to North America as a whole. The particulars of this history differ as well from a broader construct of Latin America that tends to center Hispanophone (and occasionally Lusophone) rather than Francophone sites in the Americas.

[9] While Trouillot includes Brazil in this distinction, other historical, cultural, linguistic, and geographical differences justify a separate consideration of Brazil beyond the scope of my project. Trouillot's argument about the common fundamental structuring of Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean societies based on slavery provides further justification of my comparison of the specifically French and English language-based usages of the term *créole* / *creole* in Caribbean contexts, including Louisiana and the US Gulf Coast.

[10] Chapter One includes my readings of selected texts written by free men of color in antebellum Louisiana, which are exceptionally located prior to the period I delineate. The focus of this chapter, however, is on postbellum representations of the creole surrounding cultural anxieties over national identity following the Civil War. My readings of these earlier texts are intended to examine constructions of Louisiana as creole in both French and English writing, and their inclusion serves to provide a broader interrogation of this construct, particularly in a Francophone context.

European perspective of colonial degeneracy due to distance from an ideal of Europeanness that is synonymous with whiteness:

> 'creole' is a term with multiple and overlapping genealogies. Like creoles themselves, discourses about "the creole" migrated throughout the Atlantic world. Etymologically derived from the Latin verb 'creare,' to create, 'creole' was first deployed in its Spanish colonial version—perhaps deriving from the Spanish 'criollo'—before migrating into French and British colonial lexicons as a term of New World identity. More precisely, colonists of European descent, as well as Black and mulatto slaves and freedmen born and raised in the New World, were identified as 'creoles' by the British, French, and Spanish empires. Yet the term denoted much more than the birth of a colonial subject or slave outside the "borders" of national origin (Europe or Africa). Most significantly, the term 'creole' was used to account for admixtures, or syncretisms, between Old and New World 'races' and cultures. Indeed, a European not born and raised in the West Indies but who had spent many consecutive years there might be thought to have 'become' creole-like, or degenerate, on some cultural levels according to the rhetorical operations of some European creole discourses. (8)

In the sense in which Goudie applies the term *creole*, the white person born in the Americas who is labeled a "creole" becomes implicitly racialized, or perhaps rather ethnicized, through contact with the foreignness and racial difference located in the colonies and the "newness" of the "New World."[11] These associations of the term *creole* with newness, hybridity, ambiguity, and degeneracy implicate the creole as a figure of modernity, as a new and different construct forged through colonization. Goudie's definition also challenges the idea of whiteness as racially unmarked by indicating that the construction of whiteness always has been racialized through relation to and difference from constructs of European ethnic identity. Because creoleness functions as a category of racial difference that ethnicizes even white creoles as non-European,

[11] Benedict Anderson supports Goudie's argument that the creole indexed degeneracy and contamination from the European perspective, arguing that a sense of US nationality was grounded in the distinctness of "American creoles" from Europeans: "Doubtless the confluence of a time-honoured Machiavellism with the growth of conceptions of biological and ecological contamination that accompanied the planetary spread of Europeans and European power from the sixteenth century onwards. From the sovereign's angle of vision, the American creoles, with their ever-growing numbers and increasing local rootedness with each succeeding generation, presented a historically unique political problem" (58).

and thus not fully or properly white, the figuration of the creole illustrates the contingency of whiteness and subverts hierarchies based on race by placing the entire category of whiteness into question.[12]

Along a different historical and cultural axis of the usage of *creole*, French Antillean creolization theorists have reclaimed this term to valorize a hybridized Caribbean identity and its revolutionary decolonial potential. For example, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant begin *Eloge de la Créolité / In Praise of Creoleness* with the declaration "Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Créoles. Cela sera pour nous une attitude intérieure, mieux : une vigilance, ou mieux encore une sorte d'enveloppe mentale au mitan de laquelle se bâtira notre monde en pleine conscience du monde" (13).[13] Rather than attaching a specific racial or ethnic meaning to the term, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant cast it as a source of unifying potential that connects the disparate racial identities of Caribbean people. The continual shift in meanings in the various uses of this term across time and language have led Stuart Hall to define *creole* in his essay "Créolité and the Process of Creolization" simply through its instability and the inability to attach it to any single racial or ethnic meaning: "Creole' remains a powerfully charged but also exceedingly slippery signifier. It seems impossible to freeze this term in its meaning, or to give it any kind of fixed or precise racial referent" (Hall 14). While extending Hall's argument that the term *creole* continuously evades a single definite meaning, I disagree with the implications of his statement that this results in an impossibility of "any kind of fixed or precise racial referent." While there is no precise meaning

[12] See also Chapter Three on the racialization of the white creole in Jean Rhys's writing.
[13] "Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles. This will be for us an interior attitude – better, a vigilance, or even better, a sort of mental envelope in the middle of which our world will be built in full consciousness of the outer world." Translated by Mohamed Taleb Khyar in *Callaloo*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1990, p. 886). This and all following translations of *Eloge de la créolité* are from Taleb Khyar.

of Black, white, or multiracial in the term *creole*, this term is nevertheless *always* imbued in the structure of racial and ethnic identity formations that stem from the dual histories of colonization and slavery. This term cannot be detached from this context, just as it cannot be detached from the history of the construction of categories of racial difference in slave societies. By providing a category that racializes without defining race, *creole* deconstructs the meaning of all racial categories (including the proliferation of terms that came out of slavery and specify a genealogical racial quotient: *mulatto, quadroon, octoroon,* etc.). The instability of the term *creole*, in contrast to the precise meanings of these other categories, suggests that whiteness is never a pure or stable construct, which challenges the core of the ideological formation of white supremacy.

In theorizing the development of American national identities in *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson situates the creole in a uniquely American context as a figure that facilitates the emergence of nationalism in former colonial societies. Anderson argues that idea of a shared creole identity allowed colonial Europeans to nationalistically identify with the colonies instead of the European metropole:

> Whether we think of Brazil, the USA, or the former colonies of Spain, language was not an element that differentiated them from their respective imperial metropoles. All, including the USA, were creole states, formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent with those against whom they fought. (47)

Anderson continues in framing the problematic, "why was it precisely *creole* communities that developed so early conceptions of their nation-ness–*well before most of Europe?* Why did such colonial provinces, usually containing large, oppressed, non-Spanish-speaking populations, produce creoles who consciously redefined these populations as fellow nationals?" (50). For Anderson, a notion of creole nationalism is not solely based on a shared racial, cultural, or even linguistic identity, but rather a history of colonialization and a shared identification with the

colonized space. It is important to note that Anderson's discussion of creole nationalism is not particular to the United States, but rather presents a comparative analysis of emergent nationalisms in the context of colonialism across the Americas, situating the American Revolution alongside later revolutions for colonial independence in Latin America. Anderson's account, however, does not fully acknowledge that "creole" Americans' constructed notion of nationality, which imagines the "inclusion" (or, more accurately, possession) of enslaved Africans and indigenous people in an emergent nationalism, fails to grant citizenship or human subjectivity to enslaved and colonized indigenous people. While Anderson's definition of *creole* differs from others' in casting the creole as an implicitly white national subject, my intention is not to inscribe a racial identity on any particular creole figure, but rather to emphasize that *creole* has been used both to index and ethnicize particular white identities, and also to point to a distance or difference from whiteness by implying Blackness and racial mixture. In evoking the figure of the creole, Anderson is interested in how an idea of "Americanness" facilitated an emergent nationalism amongst the elite white settler class. Anderson's explanation of creole nationalism is helpful in demonstrating that the category of the creole has always been central to constructs of an American identity, even though, as I will argue in Chapter One, in the context of the postbellum United States, the creole becomes a designation of foreignness within the union and reveals cultural anxieties surrounding constructs of the nation.

Contrary to Anderson's argument that the category of "creole" facilitates nationalistic identification, Françoise Vergès argues that creolization and creole identification can perform a resistance to imperialist nationalism and ethnocentrism due the creole's refusal of singular national and ethnic categories. Beginning with the premise that "creole identity can never become a pure ethnos," Vergès argues that because it is implicitly "translocal," the creole

"challenges the orthodoxy of national and sedentary identities" (*Kiltir* 182). Vergès continues in defining creolization as fluid process that continually navigates the contradictions of belonging: "Creolization refers to an ongoing tension between differences and unity which are *both* produced by the same structures. Creolization is a never-ended process, always *en devenir*, open (though not without resistance) to new cultural differences which are accepted *and* rejected" (*Kiltir* 182). Following Vergès argument, creolization is a dialectical action that never arrives at a fixed and permanent state. This is what allows for so many contradictory meanings and impulses to become attached to this term. The evocation of the creole is therefore never entirely liberatory nor hegemonical. In being "translocal" and challenging "the orthodoxy of national and sedentary identities," the creole can in fact result in new paradigms of militaristic national belonging and exclusion, as Anderson indicates, and yet it is not an inherently nationalistic category and paradoxically also carries the potential to resist these structures.

Dictionary definitions of *creole / créole* in both English and French maintain an ambiguity and ambivalence about the racial referent of this term that is implied in the later theoretical definitions' ambivalence about the political impetus of the creole. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *creole* as "Chiefly in the Caribbean, certain parts of the Americas (esp. tropical South America, the Gulf States, and parts of Central America), and in Mauritius and Réunion: a person born in one of these countries, but of European or African descent." While the overarching definition encompasses the range of white and Black racial identities in Caribbean and related (post)colonial contexts, the sub-definitions reference various racial and ethnic identification: "A descendant of white European settlers," "Any person of mixed ancestry," or "A person of black African descent born in the Caribbean or mainland Americas." Providing a

second linguistic definition of *creole*, the *OED* also qualifies these racial and ethnic definitions as pertaining specifically to "a person speaking a creole."[14]

French dictionaries, on the other hand, have, until recently, defined the term *créole* primarily through whiteness, despite multiracial French Antillean identifications with this term (as illustrated, for example, by Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant). The most recent edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'académie française* defines *créole* as "1. Originellement, personne de famille européenne, née dans une des anciennes colonies des régions tropicales de l'Amérique et de l'océan Indien, et plus particulièrement aux Antilles. 2. Par extension. Toute personne née dans ces régions, quelle que soit son ascendance."[15] It is of note that all previous editions up through the Eighth Edition published in 1935 define *créole* exclusively as a white person or person of European origin. The *Tresor du langue française* maintains this definitional framework in which *créole* first means whiteness: "(Personne) qui est de race blanche, d'ascendance européenne, originaire des plus anciennes colonies d'outre-mer." Only the second definition categorizes the creole as potentially Black "by extension": "*P. ext. Nègre, noir créole.* Né dans les colonies (et non en Afrique)."[16] While official French dictionary definitions of *créole* have historically limited its signification to whiteness, in *Creolization of Language and Culture*,

[14] The *OED* linguistic definition of *creole* is "A language that has developed from the mixing of two or more parent languages and has come to be the first language of a community, typically arising as the result of contact between the language of a dominant group (historically often a European colonizer) and that (or those) of a subordinate group (often the colonized people, or a slave population)." While not specifically mentioning race, it is important to note that the *OED* situated creole languages specifically in the histories of colonization and slavery, implying that mixtures of language that occur outside this history would not necessarily be considered creoles.

[15] "1. Originally, a person from a European family, born in one of the former colonies in the tropical regions of the Americas and the Indian Ocean, and more particularly in the Antilles. 2. By extension. Any person born in these regions, whatever their descent." This definition is from the Ninth Edition, published in 1992. All translations of French dictionary definitions are my own.

[16] "(Person) whose race is white, of European descent, coming from the oldest overseas colonies," and "Ext., *Negro, Black Creole*. Born in the colonies (and not in Africa)." The term "nègre" in French is considered racially offensive today, as are its English equivalents, but I am keeping this term in the citation to preserve the definitional accuracy as it pertains to my argument regarding the racialization of the creole.

French linguist Robert Chaudenson cautions against relying solely on these definitions without examining the usage of *créole* in French spoken beyond the metropolitan center:

> In both the Caribbean and the Mascarenes, during the first half of the eighteenth century the modifier *créole* applied to Whites, Mulattos, and Blacks. Although the French lexicographic tradition has until very recently restricted the application of this designation to Whites, the term has evolved extensively, depending on the place and time, in different creoles and in the different regional varieties of French that coexist with them. Constant misunderstandings and infinite polemics have of course arisen out of the use of French dictionaries as the ultimate and definitive references for the meaning of *créole*. (5)[17]

Chaudenson's etymological research on the term *créole* in French and Francophone contexts indicates the instability of its racial meaning. Yet the need to constantly define and redefine *créole* in terms of racial identity points to the centrality of this term to racial ideological discourses in European imperialist and (post)colonial American contexts as well as the persistent racialization of the figure of the creole, regardless of a particular racial identification.

Following the racial and geographic primary definition of this term, the *Trésor de langue française* continues to provide a linguistic definition of *créole*, followed by a tertiary definition that relies on neither race, nor ethnicity, nor geography, but on an idea of "temperament" that echoes tropicalist discourses of degeneracy: "(Celui ou celle) qui a le tempérament propre aux créoles ou semblable à celui des créoles, caractérisé essentiellement par l'indolence et la grâce."[18] This last definition reflects the historical cultural usage of the term as being imbued in discourses of the tropics as spaces of degeneracy. As Goudie explains, to "'become' creole" was to become "degenerate" (8), situated in opposition to a European ideology of civilization. In French, the

[17] Chaudenson does however indicate that in the French Antilles, *créole* evolved to have a predominate association with whiteness prior to the emergence of creolization theory in the mid-twentieth century: "In the Lesser Antilles, the semantics has evolved in the opposite direction. The term *créole* is reserved for Whites only, although over the past few years things have evolved concurrently with affirmations of Antillais identity" (6).

[18] "(Him or her) who has the temperament belonging to the creoles or resembling that of the creoles, essentially characterized by indolence and charm."

term "créole" can directly index an ideological position ascribed to this figure while bypassing a direct and precise racial, geographic, or cultural identification. Pursuing this definition further, the *Trésor de langue française* defines *indolence* as dispassion, but also "Disposition à se donner le moins de peine possible, à agir avec lenteur et mollesse"[19] and *grâce* (when not used in a religious context) as "Aspèct agréable" and "charme attaché à la personne, à son air, à ses manières."[20] The associations of these terms reflect not only the ideology of tropical degeneracy (the white creole of European descent becoming indolent, lazy, and unproductive through contact with the tropics), but also constructions of gender. These suggestions of "Grace," "charm," and "languishing" impart feminized ideological associations, thus demonstrating a gendered figuration of the "creole" that cooccurs with this term's racializing associations. The gendered dimensions of this definition therefore support my argument that the figure of the creole is implicitly feminized through its associations of feminine excess and deviance, which also render the creole queer.

Creole Modernism

My interest in the figure of the creole began with this term's uncertainty, ambiguity, and indeterminacy, which point to a conceptual and categorical instability of meaning and identity and a sense of hybridity along with the transgression of borders – all descriptors that can also be applied to modernist aesthetics. Yet associated with the regional, often confined to the setting of Louisiana and the Caribbean in Anglophone and Francophone contexts, the creole seems to be a pre-modernist figure, positioned outside of or prior to modernity. This seeming contradiction has led me to ask what happens to the figure of the creole in the context of modernism. Addressing

[19] "Being disposed to giving the least effort possible, to act slowly and languidly."
[20] "With an agreeable aspect," and "a charm attached to a person's presence and mannerisms."

this question requires an expanded definition of modernism, even when working within the traditional periodization that defines Anglo-modernism as occurring primarily around the 1920s and 1930s, between the world wars.[21] My definition of modernism focuses not on European war and social change, but on the global sense of rupture instantiating modernity that occurred much earlier through the middle passage and the violent destruction of indigenous lives and cultures instantiated by the colonization of the Americas. This definitional shift in understandings of modernity is informed by the scholarship of Paul Gilroy and Simon Gikandi.

Following Paul Gilroy's re-conceptual framing of modernity as beginning with the middle passage, various scholars have called for an expansion of modernist studies beyond the spatial and temporal context of European and United States centric focuses on the interwar period. Gilroy shifts the paradigm of modernist studies by arguing that Western notions of modernity and civilization were constituted through the violent history of slavery, instantiated through the violent rupture of the middle passage:

> Ships also refer us back to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernisation. As it were, getting on board promises a means to reconceptualise the orthodox relationship between modernity and what passes for its prehistory. It provides a different sense of where modernity might itself be thought to begin in the constitutive relationships with outsiders that both found and temper a self-conscious sense of western civilization. (17)

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[21] In scholarly dialogues over the periodization of Modernist Studies, Susan Stanford Friedman challenges the traditional disciplinary framing to encompass a broad planetary and trans-historic range: "In all its various forms in geohistory, modernity produces heightened, often extreme and accelerating change that spreads through the various domains of society—from the technological and commercial to the political and philosophical; from the aesthetic and cultural to the epistemological and linguistic. Modernity can signal rebellion or capitulation—thus, *contradictory*. Modernity can enslave or free, shatter or exhilarate, displace or replace, dismantle or reassemble—thus, *utopian* and *dystopian* at once. Modernity is itself rupture: a paradigm shift, a geohistorical transformation on a large scale. Like the modernity of which it is part, modernism is also multiple, polycentric, relational, and recurrent. Modernism, as I use the term in *Planetary Modernisms*, is not a single aesthetic period, a movement, or a style. Instead, the creative expressivities in all media constitute the modernisms of given modernities—on a planetary scale, across time, in the *longue durée*" (4). As I am sympathetic to the expansion of the disciplinary framing of Modernist Studies, my project is to expand the definitional framing of this field. I do this within the traditional temporal confines ascribed to modernist aesthetics but suggest that modernity goes beyond aesthetic periodization and is rather a historical and cultural moment haunted by the residue of prior violent ruptures.

In defining Caribbean modernism and modernity in *Writing in Limbo*, Simon Gikandi expands Gilroy's argument through the overlapping histories of colonialism and slavery, locating the instantiation of modernity further back in the "discovery" of the New World:

> Caribbean literature and culture are haunted by the presence of the "discoverer" and the historical moment he inaugurates. For if Columbus's "discovery" of the Americas and his initial encounter with the peoples of the New World have paradigmatic value in the European episteme because they usher in a brave new world, a world of modernity and modernist forms, […] these events also trigger a contrary effect on the people who are "discovered" and conquered. (1)

Gikandi furthermore defines modernism as "closely related to the process of creolization" as it poses a "counter-discourse away from outmoded and conventional modes of representation associated with colonial domination and colonizing structures" (5). [22] Through this definition, Gikandi demonstrates that both the concept of creolization or a creole Caribbean identity and the literary, cultural, and ideological position of what could be considered Caribbean modernism require a continued negotiation of relation and opposition to European culture and the notion of constituting something new and revolutionary out of the process of colonial interaction.[23] In

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[22] In defining "Caribbean Modernism," Mary Lou Emery credits Friedman's conception of the planetary and connects this concept back to the history of slavery, referencing Glissant's grounding of creolization in the history of slavery, a theoretical move that echoes Gilroy and Gikandi's definitions of modernity: "Finally, in Glissant's analysis of what he terms the 'cry of the plantation,' we find the particularly Caribbean terrain — geographical, temporal, cultural, and ecological — that grounds a planetary vision, evolving from, but also countering the global" (50).

[23] Gikandi acknowledges both the potential of creolization to resist European hegemony and the potential for this process to fall back into a privileging of European origins. "For many Caribbean writers and intellectuals, creolization has come to represent a unique kind of Caribbean modernism, one that resists the colonizing structures through the diversion of the colonial language and still manages to reconcile the values of European literacy with the long-repressed traditions of African orality" (Gikandi 16). Whether creolization and representation of creole languages and identities is revolutionary and decolonial or a re-inscription of a European imperial social order is a subject of debate that my dissertation seeks to extend but not resolve. From a decolonial feminist perspective, Françoise Vergès argues for example that creolization is a practice of resistance, focusing on the example of Réunion: "Creolization is a subversive concept if it remains continuously linked to the subterranean struggle and resistance of populations confronted with brutal and raw power, with monolingualism and mono-culturalism. Creolization must valorize vernacular practices and solidarity among the oppressed. Its roots in slavery and plantation economies imply an ethics of responsibility for fragile lives, seeking common ground rather than egotistical profit." (*Creolization* 40)

extending Gilroy and Gikandi's definitions of modernity, it is my contention that the creole is a figure that emerges out of this modernist context: the violent ruptures engendered out of colonization, slavery, imposed exchange, and the instantiating of new categories of identity and the self as a result. What I add to Gilroy and Gikandi's formulations of modernity is a focus specifically on the literary and cultural representation of the figure of the creole and creolization as not just evocative of rupture from the historical violences that haunt modernity, but also an expansion of fluidity, ambiguity, and ambivalence that arises from these histories and resists the consolidation of stable categories. In viewing the creole as encapsulating modernist evocations of fluidity and ambivalence in terms of gender and sexuality, I situate a queer and feminist framework in dialogue with Gilroy and Gikandi's framing of modernism through histories of slavery, colonialism, and race.

Whereas Gikandi conceptualizes modernist aesthetics in mid and late twentieth-century Caribbean literature that comes after the *négritude* movement (which is considered foundational to the possibility of a post-colonial French Antillean, and by extension, Black Caribbean literature in much of the scholarship), my interest is in expanding the archive back to the traditional temporal framing of modernism to evaluate what came before, asking what writers were in dialogue with and against the canonical Western high modernists and acknowledging the avant-garde aesthetic and political impulses of creole literature produced before and during the traditional modernist period of the 1920s and 30s. My expansion of the archive includes a particular attention to writing by women that has been unaccounted for, especially in French Antillean literature, in which the masculinist formation of *négritude* is often understood to coalesce around a limited group of men.[24] Rather than formulating my analysis as a

[24] A. James Arnold supports this point, arguing, "The *créolité* movement has inherited from its antecedents *antillanité* and *négritude*, a sharply gendered identity. Like them, it is not only masculine but masculinist. Like

geographically focused study of Caribbean modernism, I frame the scope of my dissertation in terms of the creole in order to challenge the imposition of national, cultural, geographic, and linguistic borders. While not all the works of literature I examine have a characteristically modernist aesthetics, they situate the creole as a site of rupture, uncertainty, and possibility, challenging conventional social modes. This indicates that the creole is fundamental to the structure of modernist production.

Discourses of modernism and of creolization, even as they challenge imperialist systems, both present potential harm in perpetuating the violent erasure of indigenous identities and experiences in cultural discourses. Shona Jackson takes on the nationalist implications of Caribbean creolization theory and politics in *Creole Indigeneity*, positioning her work as a critique of "how Creoles and Indigenous Peoples within the postcolonial state come to be subject to different narratives of belonging and forms of citizenship and sovereignty" (2).[25] Jackson argues that the formulation of a creole national subject works to erode claims to land and continued presence of indigenous people in the Caribbean:

> As the product of the labor of the enslaved and indentured in the Caribbean, the postcolonial state is perceived as an ethnic inheritance for Creoles, not for Indigenous Peoples. Thus we are left with two senses of indigeneity: Creole ones that are associated with material accumulation, and those for Indigenous peoples […] that come to be associated with deprivation and underdevelopment. (4)

Referencing Gilroy's definition of modernity, Jackson indicates that the formulation of the category of the "creole" against the "indigenous" is another feature to contend with in notions of modernity:

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them, it permits only male talents to emerge within the movement, to carry its seal of approval. And, like them, it pushes literature written by women into the background" (21).

[25] Jackson considers both Afro-Caribbean and Asian-Caribbean people as "creoles" while acknowledging the different histories that have constructed a creole Caribbean identity for both groups. It is important to note that Jackson's use of "creole" to encompass multiple racial and ethnic identities is not intended to imply a uniformity in perspective or politics.

> While Black subordination is often considered foundational for European modernity, I hope to demonstrate that it is more complexly intertwined with the subordination of Indigenous peoples. […] it is not a matter of either Blacks *or* Indigenous Peoples, but it is the relationship into which they are placed under colonialism that is definitive for Caribbean modernity (5).

Discourses of modernity have a vexed relationship to Indigenous Studies, as the modern is often positioned against the indigenous or elicited in a call to "modernize" or erase indigenous peoples. In a discussion of creole modernism, is important to recognize that discourses of modernism and modernity have been deployed to enforce the assimilation and erasure of indigenous perspectives. Jackson's work in *Creole Indigeneity* raises important questions about the relationship between creole and indigenous figures. To incorporate Native identities into the resonances of *creole*, however, could also imply containment and erasure of indigenous presence through assimilation with other identities in the process of creolization in which indigenous identities are subsumed and replaced by others. Integrating the indigenous into the creole does not present an easy solution due to the foundational historical narrative of a completed genocide of indigenous people in the Caribbean that has resulted in an absence of indigenous presence in the texts I study and the cultural discourses that shaped them. Indigeneity remains marginal in creole modernism. When Native people are figured, they are envisioned through the history of genocide and relegated to the reservation, as in Jean Rhys's novel *Voyage in the Dark*, or through the complicated history of appropriation in various African American and Black Caribbean discourses. These include the claims to indigeneity by the free men of color published in *Les Cenelles*, the *négritude* movement's appeal to a "native" status, and the performance of indigeneity in the tradition of Carnival Indians featured in Alice Dunbar Nelson's short story "A Carnival Jangle." I note these marginal evocations of indigenous presence as moments of rupture in these texts that challenge the geographic, racial, and national claims mobilized through the

concept of the creole. Jacksons' intervention into creolization theory from the perspective of indigenous studies provides an important caution that the creole is not always revolutionary or liberatory and in fact can be discursively manifested to enact and perpetuate violences tied to its instantiation through colonialism.

Considering how creole figures enter into modernist representations poses an intervention into the way modernism is conceptualized in relation to constructions of race and gender. The creole figure can be aestheticized as modernist through its evocations of racial hybridity and ambiguity, its associations with newness and difference, and ways in which *creole* might resist representation, knowing, and even legibility. Creole identity is further rendered "illegible" through its association with creole languages, which are racialized through association with Afro-Caribbean speakers and seen as "improper" or "inadequate" forms of French, English, and other European languages. While my focus is not on the linguistic situation of creole language but rather on representation and figuration of what gets labeled as "creole" and attached to this term, another designation of *creole* could be linguistic difference, or rather the position of the not-quite standard usage of the dominant European language, but not entirely something else: a mixture, patois, or dialect. Christopher GoGwilt consolidates the concept of "creole modernism" around the literary output of Jean Rhys, treating her as an emblematic figure for what the concept "creole modernism" might index. According to GoGwilt, although Rhys does not write in creole language, her linguistic positioning as a creole becomes legible in the gaps and elisions that characterize her modernist writing style, as well as the intrusion of French phrases and dialogue in her prose. As GoGwilt argues, "Creole modernism threatens the legibility of English print, for Rhys, by reopening the differences–and disputes–embedded in the 'shades of dialect' that haunt all language" (34). Following GoGwilt's argument, rather than writing in dialect, Rhys makes

legible the ways in which all language is "dialect." I borrow the term "creole modernism" from GoGwilt and acknowledge the impossibility of considering what the figure of the creole means in the context of Anglophone modernism without turning to the canonical status of Rhys and her investment in and self-identification with the literary representation of creole figures.[26] However, I am also interested in de-centering Rhys' attachment to the creole (although her writing is the subject of Chapter Three) and considering what possibilities emerge when situating her works alongside other very different iterations of creole modernism, for example in French Antillean literature, American Regionalism, and Claude McKay's ambiguous position in relation to colonial literary traditions. Beyond considering how creole figures reflect a modernist aesthetics of impasse, erasure, hybridity, and indeterminacy, or how they might intervene in the European literary tradition through a post-colonialist lens, my interest is in thinking how creole representations have been taken up in a modernist context as both haunting remainders of histories of slavery and colonization *and* modernist challenges to gendered, racial, and national identity constructs.

Creolization in Theory

For French creolization theorists, the creole or *créolité*, indexing hybridity, comes to be a figure of decolonial resistance and valorization of Antillean identity. In *Éloge de la créolité*,

[26]Anhki Mukherjee has also used the term "Creole Modernism" in an article evaluating Jean Rhys alongside Derek Walcott: "what I term 'Creole modernism' as not simply imitation but articulation of difference and a rewriting of influence: a different way altogether of being modern in the world" (26). H. Adlai Murdoch provides a definition of "creole modernism" more similar to my own as the transposition of the ambiguities and ambivalences that structure the figure of the creole into textual production: "Thus the shifting and structurally unstable inscription of the creole figure echoes, in a key way, critical ambiguities of political structure and social position that shaped the colonial encounter in the region in a number of ways. The suspect beginnings of the term 'creole; as embodying colonialism's repulsion for the fearfully unnameable and unplacable hybrid monstrosity, the undesired product of colonial *métissage*, ultimately overdetermined the ostensibly separate races of white and black, even as the boundaries and practices that presumably separated them were increasingly and unalterably blurred" (146-7). See Chapter Three for my discussion of Mukherjee and Murdoch's scholarship on Jean Rhys.

Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant proclaim an identification with creole hybridity as a central component of their vision of *Antillanité* (Antilleanness/Caribbeanness):

> l'Antillanité ne nous est pas accessible sans vision intérieur. Et la vision intérieur n'est rien sans la totale acceptation de notre créolité. Nous nous déclarons créoles. Nous déclarons que la Créolité est le ciment de notre culture et qu'elle doit régir les fondations de notre antillanité. La Créolité est l'*agrégat interactionnel ou transactionnel*, des éléments culturels caraïbes, européens, africains, asiatiques, et levantins, que le joug de l'Histoire a réunis sur le même sol. (26)[27]

Valorizing a poststructuralist hybridity, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant define *creolité* (creoleness) as an indefinite totality: "'*le monde diffracté mais recomposé*,' un maelström des signifiés dans un seul signifiant: une Totalité. Et nous disons qu'il n'est pas dommageable pour l'instant, de ne pas en avoir une définition" (28).[28] While this definition of *créolité* allows for hybridity and the ultimate refusal of a definition, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant's preservation and valorization of a sense of Totality indicates a longing for closure and definition that makes *créolité* revolutionary but limited, indicative of an achievable horizon or a boundary to meaning.

Edouard Glissant's theory of Relation as an absolute totality builds on Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant's conception of *créolité*. In *Discours Antillais*, Glissant provides a more abstracted definition of creole that resists fathomability through a process of continual relationality. He locates creole identity and specifically creole language as emerging from

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[27] "We cannot reach Caribbeanness without interior vision. And interior vision is nothing without the unconditional acceptance of our Creoleness. We declare ourselves Creoles. We declare that Creoleness is the cement of our culture and that it ought to rule the foundations of our Caribbeanness. Creoleness is the interactional or transactional aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history" (Taleb Khyar 891).

[28] "Creoleness is '*the world diffracted by recomposed*,' a maelstrom of signifieds in a single signifier: a Totality. And we think that it is time to give a definition of it" (Taleb Khyar 892). A literal translation of the second sentence of this quotation would be "and we say it isn't damning, at this instant, to not have had a definition of it," which indicates more uncertainty surrounding a definition of "creole" than is reflected in Taleb Khyar's translation.

slavery and putting linguistic meaning, translation, and the signification of the word into question through the cry of the slave:

> Des l'abord (c'est-à-dire, dès l'instant où le créole est forgé comme moyen terme entre l'esclave et le maître), le cri impose à l'esclave sa syntaxe particulière. Pour l'Antillais, le mot est d'abord son. Le bruit est parole. Le vacarme est discours. Il faut comprendre cela. Il semble qu'intention et tonalité se soient conjuguées pour l'homme déraciné, dans l'implacable univers muet du servage. C'est le volume du son qui signifie : la hauteur du son porte le signifié. Mise entre parenthèses du concept. On s'entend par sous-entendu bruité, dans lequel le maître, si habile par ailleurs à manier le « créole de base », se perdra. Le créole du béké jamais chahuté à voix éperdue. Puisqu'il est interdit de parler, on camouflera la parole sous la provocation paroxystique du cri. Nul n'irait traduire que ce cri si évident puisse signifier. On n'y supposera que l'appel de la bête. C'est ainsi que l'homme dépossédé organisera sa parole en la tramant dans l'apparent insignifié du bruit. (*Discours* 406)[29]

Use of Creole language as a strategy of resistant camouflage thus, for Glissant, is not a choice, but enacted through the violence imposed on the slave. In casting creole as a middle term between master and slave, Glissant adds a dimension to the hybrid associations of this term as indicating an uneasy and untranslatable meaning forged in the extreme violence of enslavement. Glissant thus posits relationality, and the related concept of intimacy enacted in the extreme as a form of violence of slavery, and the *creole* as the remainder of this violence:

> Ce que le créole transmettait, dans l'univers des Plantations, c'était avant tout un refus. On pourrait à partir de là définir un mode nouveau de la structuration linguistique qui serrait « négatif » ou « réactif », différent de la structuration « naturelle » des langues traditionnelles. En ceci, la langue créole apparaît comme organiquement liée à l'expérience mondiale de la Relation. Elle est littéralement une conséquence de la mise

[29] "From the outset (that is, from the moment Creole is forged as a medium of communication between slave and master), the spoken imposes on the slave its particular syntax. For Caribbean man, the word is first and foremost sound. Noise is essential to speech. Din is discourse. This must be understood. It seems that meaning and pitch went together for the uprooted individual, in the unrelenting silence of the world of slavery. It was the intensity of the sound that dictated meaning: the pitch of the sound conferred significance. Ideas were bracketed. One person could make himself understood through the subtle associations of sound in which the master, so capable of managing "basic Creole" in other situations, got hopelessly lost. Creole spoken by the *békés* was never shouted out loud. Since speech was forbidden, slaves camouflaged the word under the provocative intensity of the scream. No one could translate the meaning of what seemed to be nothing but a shout. It was taken to be nothing but the call of a wild animal. This is how the dispossessed man organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise" (*Caribbean* 123-4).

> en rapport des cultures différentes, et n'a pas préexisté à ces rapports. Ce n'est pas une langue de l'Être, c'est une langue du Relaté. (*Discours* 411)[30]

While referencing Hegel and instantiating a dialogue with Afropessimist theories by arguing that the slave is removed from the category of the (human) Being and forced into the alternative category of the Related (and therefore not a Being for the self in Hegelian terms), Glissant demonstrates that enforced hybridity is a form of violence destructive to the individual and interiority.

In addition to linguistic hybridization, the other form of exchange referenced by the concept of creolization is racial mixing. Glissant acknowledges the history of *métissage* (racial mixture) in the Caribbean as well as the discursive dimension of *métissage* in Caribbean culture, associating this with his theory of Relation, yet he maintains that creolization surpasses *métissage*:

> What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word *creolization*, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible. It is not merely an encounter, a shock (in Segalen's sense), a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry. (*Poetics* 34)

Glissant continues, elaborating on the distinction in which creolization enacts a "limitless" totality whereas *métissage* is a more fixed or definite process:

> If we posit *métissage* as, generally speaking, the meeting point and synthesis of two differences, creolization seems to be a limitless *métissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable. Creolization diffracts, whereas certain forms of *métissage* can concentrate one more time. Here it is devoted to what has burst forth from lands that are no longer islands. Its most obvious symbol is in the Creole language, whose genius

[30] "The role of Creole in the world of the plantations was that of defiance. One could, based on this, define its new mode of structured evolution as "negative" or "reactive," different from the "natural" structural evolution of traditional languages. In this, the creole language appears to be organically linked to the cross-cultural phenomenon worldwide. It is literally the result of contact between different cultures and did not preexist this contact. It is not a language of a single origin, it is a cross-cultural language" (*Caribbean* 127). A more direct and theoretically precise translation of this last sentence would be "It is not a language of Being but a language of Relation." I believe it is significant that Glissant capitalizes these terms, evoking Hegel with the concept of "Being" and his own theory of Relation.

> consists in always being open, that is, perhaps, never becoming fixed except according to systems of variables that we have to imagine as much as define. Creolization carries along then into the adventure of multilingualism and into the incredible explosion of cultures. But the explosion of cultures does not mean they are scattered or mutually diluted. It is the violent sign of their consensual, not imposed sharing. (*Poetics* 34)

Although Glissant's concept of relation can seem an idealization of continuous exchange, his point that "It is the violent sign of their consensual, not imposed sharing" provides a less optimistic assessment of exchange and an important reminder of how intercultural contact has a history of force, asymmetrical power relations, and sexual violence. He mentions that this process is "consensual, not imposed" (whereas, as Sadia Hartman demonstrates, the history of interracial sexuality, or *métissage*, in slave societies often involved non-consensual sexual violence). And yet, for Glissant, Relation remains "violent." While the ideal of relation assumes an equality in exchange, it is impossible to decontextualize relationality from the power imbalances that have forged creolization through the histories of colonization and slavery.[31] While Glissant does not specifically gender his conception of relation, relatedness is also a feminized concept through its associations of intimacy and the private sphere. It's a concept that indexes sexuality and hybridity as modes of embodied relationality. Building on Glissant's

[31] The term *métissage* in French can be considered equivalent to the Spanish language term *mestizaje*, although this term has taken on broader theoretical implications in Latin American and Latinx Studies. Antonio Benítez-Rojo makes an argument for viewing Caribbean literature (focusing on Hispanophone contexts) through the theoretical lens of *mestizaje*, which bears some conceptual similarities to *créolité* in French Caribbean theories: "The high regard for *mestizaje*, the *mestizaje* solution, did not originate in Africa or Indoamerica or with any People of the Sea. It involves a positivistic and logocentric argument, an argument that sees in the biological, economic, and cultural whitening of Caribbean society a series of successive steps toward "progress." And as such it refers to conquest, to slavery, neocolonialism, and dependence. Within the realities of a rereading, *mestizaje* is nothing more than a concentration of differences, a tangle of dynamics obtained by means of a greater density of the Caribbean object […]. Then, at a given moment in our rereading, the binary oppositions of Europe/Indoamerica, Europe/Africa and Europe/Asia do not resolve themselves into the synthesis of *mestizaje*, but rather they resolve into insoluble differential equations, which repeat their unknowns through the ages of the meta-archipelago. The literature of the Caribbean can be read as a *mestizo* text, but also as a stream of texts in flight, in intense differentiation among themselves and within whose complex coexistence there are vague regularities, usually paradoxical. The Caribbean poem and novel are not only projects for ironizing a set of values taken as universal; they are, also, projects that communicate their own turbulence, their own clash, and their own void, the swirling black hole of social violence produced by the *encomienda* and the plantation, that is, their otherness, their peripheral asymmetry with regard to the West" (27).

concept, as well as queer and feminist theories in my dissertation, I consider geographical and historical Relationality as an intimate process that is deeply entwined with theories of sexuality and gender from the reproductive politics that produce and categorize the creole subject to the sexual violence and emergence of possibility for sexual re-identifications that structure transatlantic space.

Intimate Geographies

In defining the conceptual framing of intimacy, I am drawing upon the theoretical work of Édouard Glissant's *Discours Antillais / Caribbean Discourse* and *Poetics of Relation*, coming from the framework of Caribbean Creolization theory, as well as Ann Laura Stoler and Lisa Lowe's contributions to postcolonial and gender studies through their theoretical developments of the concept of "intimacy" as a category of analysis for colonial geography. In her essay "Tense and Tender Ties," Stoler defines the use of intimacy as a conceptual tool of analysis of colonial structures of power by asking, "how intimate domains—sex, sentiment, domestic arrangement, and childrearing—figure in the making of racial categories and management of imperial rule" (829).[32] I explore the generative potential of looking at Stoler and Lowe's deployment of the concept of intimacy in (post)colonial studies (and the gendered resonances of their expansions of Lauren Berlant's use of this term) as well as Glissant's theory of Relation. I consider geographical and historical Relationality as an intimate process that is deeply entwined

[32] In *Haunted by Empire*, Stoler expands upon this essay to argue that the realm of the intimate is a useful category for understanding the state exercise of power: "Because expressions of intimacy are so implicated in the exercise of power, they provide strategic nodes of comparison, unevenly laced with state effects. But giving weight to the intimate is not to suggest that these are the sites of deeper truths where the secrets of the state are stored. What it does allow is a call to question cherished assumptions: that the intimate is located primarily in the family, that the family is a ready model for, and microcosm of, the state, and that affective ties are inherently tender ones" (15-16). Lowe's *Intimacies of Four Contents* developed from an essay that was first published in *Haunted by Empire* (ed. Stoler), and thus expands upon Stoler's theorization of intimacy in a colonial context.

with theories of sexuality and gender from the reproductive politics that produce and categorize the creole subject to the sexual violence and emergence of possibility for sexual re-identifications that structure transatlantic space.

For Glissant, the haunting evocations of history, particularly the middle passage produce a relationality through a shared geographical haunting. This haunting, in fact, is a defining feature of what Glissant terms American Literature (Literature of the Americas):

> Je crois que la hantise du passé (c'est une idée que l'on a largement évoquée) est un des référents essentiels de la production littéraire des Amériques. Ce qui « se passe » en fait, c'est qu'il semble qu'il s'agisse de débrouiller une chronologie qui s'est embuée, quand elle n'a pas été oblitérée pour toutes sortes de raisons, en particulier coloniales. Le romancier américain, quelle que soit la zone culturelle à laquelle il appartient, n'est pas du tout à la recherche d'un temps perdu, mais se trouve, se débat dans un temps éperdu. (*Discours* 345-6)[33]

This attenuation and continuation of the disrupting and disturbing past that haunts geographically disparate spaces in the transatlantic zone, Glissant argues, allows for a transitivity of space:

> Puis, ce temps éclaté, souffert est lié à des espaces « transportés ». Je pense aussi bien aux espaces africains qu'a une espace breton, dont les « souvenirs » viennent se plaquer sur la réalité spatiale que nous vivons les uns et les autres. Confronter le temps, c'est donc ici en nier la linéarité. (436)[34]

Although he distinguishes the Americas from both European and African spaces in the register of haunting, it becomes clear that in a spatial sense both Europe and Africa continue to occupy the Americas as vestiges of the middle passage, and that these locations across the Atlantic are similarly haunted by their implication in the middle passage. The middle passage thus is not a

[33] "I think that the haunting nature of the past (it is a point that has been widely raised) is one of the essential points of reference in the works produced in the Americas. What "hap- pens," indeed, is that it is apparently a question of shedding light on a chronology that has become obscure, when it is not completely effaced for all kinds of reasons, especially colonial ones. The American novelist, whatever the cultural zone he belongs to, is not at all in search of a lost time, but finds himself struggling in the confusion of time" (*Caribbean* 144).

[34] "Also, that this exploded, suffered time is linked to "transferred" space. I have in mind African space as much as Breton space, the "memory" of which has become stamped on the spatial reality that we all live. To confront time is, therefore, for us to deny its linear structure" (144-5).

locatable zone in the Atlantic Ocean, but a space of non-linear temporality that extends to all sites of the transatlantic slave trade and the dual colonization of Africa and the Americas, evoking the violent overlay of these spaces and the simultaneous haunting of this history all at once.

Beyond Glissant's relationality, the framework of intimacy proposed by Lisa Lowe provides an understanding of geography that imbues constructions of the personal and reflects the gendered and sexual constructions of relationality that have forged creole identities. While Lisa Lowe's theory of intimacy develops from an overarching planetary approach that traces the relocation of indentured laborers from South and East Asia to the Caribbean, she uses the term intimacy specifically to capture the reproductive biopower that circulates under the culture of imperialism as well as the sexual violence that is done to individuals treated as exportable and exploitable commodity/labor:

> Just as we may observe colonial divisions of humanity, I suggest there is also a colonial division of intimacy, which charts the historically differentiated access to the domains of liberal personhood, from interiority and individual will, to the possession of property and domesticity. In this sense, I employ the concept of intimacy as a way to develop a "political economy" of intimacies, by which I mean a particular calculus governing the production, distribution, and possession of intimacy. This understanding unsettles the meaning of intimacy as the privileged sign of liberal interiority or domesticity, by situating this more familiar meaning in relation to the global processes and colonial connections that are the conditions of its production. (18)

Lowe's definition of intimacy captures the ways in which this geographical relation that produces the "creole" subject works through relations of history, race, and geography, as well as gender, sexuality, and sexual violence.

The concept of intimacy challenges traditional framing of geographical borders that lead to the Caribbean, United States and Europe being studied as disparate regions, relegated to separate scholarly disciplinary framings. The enforcement of nationalist and regionalist

boundaries in academic research thus inhibits a consideration of the ways in which the concept of the creole does not adhere to these national, regional, or linguistic borders. While both Glissant and Lowe suggest a global dimension (for Glissant in the totality of Relation and for Lowe in the cartographical scope of colonial histories that encircled the globe), both of their frameworks are grounded in specificities of the creolizing cultural processes that resulted from the congruence of multiple colonial violences that emerged in a particular way in the Caribbean. In addition to reconceptualizing a creole geography, the conceptual framing of intimacy allows for a consideration of a gendered relationality reflected in the figure of the creole that occurs through sexuality and reproduction.

Gendering and Queering the Creole

In addition to the multivalent discourses of racialization attached to *creole*, I argue that creole figures are also implicitly gendered, and feminized in particular. The possibility of the creole emerges through the reproductive biopolitics of slavery and colonialism in which multiracial identities were constituted as potentially engendered through rape (particularly the white male slave holder's sexual violation of the enslaved woman). Saidiya Hartman argues that Black enslaved women were gendered through sexual assault, that they were "presumed to be always willing" (81). Hartman then argues that this history of legally sanctioned sexual violence in extricable from the engendering of Black women, and that "the erasure or disavowal of sexual violence engendered Black femaleness as a condition of unredressed injury, which only intensified the bonds of captivity and the deadening objectification of chattel status" (101). This leads Harman to define the gender of Black women as constituted through this history: "this repression of violence constitutes [Black] female gender as the locus of both unredressed and

negligible injury" (80). While the figure of the creole is not always a Black woman, and is in fact defined in part by the inability to fix creole identity to any single racial category, this figure is nonetheless intimately entangled with this history of violation. In considering the residue of this history, I argue that the concept of "intimacy" (including its potentially violent evocations) is deeply implicated in the process of engendering the figure of the creole.

The creole is potentially the child produced from the violence of slavery and defined in relation to its engendering through colonialism and the forced entanglements of Europeans with indigenous, African, and Asian people. Referring to the French colonial education system, François Vergès argues that the biracial (male) child (*le métis*) served as a figure for the perpetuation of the imperial state:

> Le projet colonial était clair : un bon métis, mâle, était celui qui servait le projet colonialiste et qui rejetait le monde de sa mère. […] On orienta les filles métisses vers les carrières religieuses afin qu'elles ne polluent pas le sang des garçons blancs. Et les garçons métis furent orientés vers les carrières militaires de l'armée coloniale. (*Métissage* 76)[35]

As the definitions of *creole* demonstrate, the figure of the creole is not necessarily the *métis* because this term does consistently pertain to a single racial identity, however, more broadly, the creole could be figured as the child of European colonialism born in the colonies as a result of the processes of colonization. While Vergès genders the *métis* as a male figure who enters into the colonial order through the rejection of his racialized mother and service to the French state, when considering the domain of intimacy, sexuality, and reproduction as sites of biopolitical

[35] "The colonial project was clear: a good *métis* [biracial child], male, was one who served the colonialist project and rejected the world of his mother. […] Mixed girls were oriented towards religious careers [as nuns] so that they would not pollute the blood of white boys. And mixed boys were oriented towards military careers in the colonial army" (My translation). Vergès is not referring specifically to the Antilles in this analysis, but to the entire French colonial system with particular examples from French colonial Indochina (Vietnam) and white metropolitan French feminists' support of the colonial education system at the time of the 1931 Exposition Coloniale in Paris.

regulation to perpetuate the colonial state, this figure becomes feminized: the biracial girl whose sexuality threatens to corrupt the whiteness of French boys (and thus the nation).

Adding to an understanding of constructions of the creole as a feminine (or feminized) figure, Carolyn Vellenga Berman considers how the category of the domestic was produced and unsettled through creole mothering. Approaching the concept of the domestic in the context of nineteenth century domestic fiction produced in (post)colonial American contexts, Vellenga Berman argues that from this geographical perspective, *creole* can be construed to mean domestic, and perhaps improperly so:

> To recover the etymological sense of the "Creole" (meaning "brought up domestically" [in the context of the Americas]), as I am proposing here, it to reassert the significance of the colonial mother and her child-raising function in the history of colonial slavery and its effects on modern culture. It reintroduces the importation of childbearing women, both slave and free, to the colonies as a crucial component of this history; it reminds us of the interplay between colonial reforms and "domestic" propaganda; and it focuses our attention on the educational roles of the nanny, the governess, the mother, the church, the state, and the 'family' in their national and transnational dimensions. (7)

As Vergès has also suggested, the biopolitical management of the category of the creole functions in the service of the (re)production of the colonial state, including through the perpetuation of its hegemonic whiteness. Vellenga Berman, however, suggests that this figure does not remain attached to this normative and hegemonic function. In fact, the creole feminine can also serve to disrupt and challenge the nationalist ideological construct, "unsettling and revising the boundaries of family and nation—along with the very concept of the 'domestic'" (16). Vellenga Berman, however, notes that the feminine creole's function is not always revolutionary and this figure can paradoxically be reappropriated to further nationalist ideological constructs all the while deconstructing racial identity categories: "Rather than signifying whiteness, blackness, or mixed-race identity, the "Creole" name described colonial subjects as 'domestic' in a problematic way. In so doing, however, Creole characterization

helped to develop and refine nineteenth-century ideas of both racial and national belonging" (22). While the scope of my dissertation does not extend to nineteenth-century domestic fiction, I examine other feminized literary genres carried over from the nineteenth century, particularly *doudouism*, a French Antillean genre of exoticism. While my project is to not re-classify late nineteenth and early twentieth century productions of these genres as (proto)modernist, I am interested in how these genres continue into the modernist literary period while producing figural evocations of the feminine creole to enact the stylistic and ideological disruptions associated with modernity. While not expressly "domestic," these texts unsettle related categories of home and family alongside gender, sexuality, and racial identity in order to problematize the ideological production of these categories in perpetuation of the imperial nation.

The *creole* is gendered as well through its significations of excess and extremes due to the overdetermined position it occupies, in which it can be made to represent potentially anything and yet in itself has no singular or stable meaning. The attachment of excessive meanings to *creole* indexes femininity, particularly racialized and queer femininity as exceeding the normative. In addition to a feminine gendering through the associations of intimacy, domesticity, reproduction, and problematic sexuality, I argue that the creole can also operate as queer through its disruption of these ideologies. While I read "queerness" in these texts through evocations of same-sex desire and intimacy and disruptions of normative gendered identities, and there is sufficient biographical evidence that at least one of the writers of my study, Claude McKay, engaged in same-sex relationships, my deployment of queer theory is not an attempt to classify or enforce a particular sexual or gender identity upon any writer or text. Rather my definition of queerness is expansive, following recent queer theory, as a disruption of the normative in relation to intimacy, sexuality, and constructions of family in service of the state,

the same categories that the creole also problematizes. In considering the creole as a potentially queered figure, I extend Fatima El-Tayeb's definition of queer as it can be applied to racial and ethnic minorities in nationalist discourses:

> One of the most intriguing aspects of queer of color critique after all is its resurrection of 'queer' as a term that is not merely synonymous with 'homosexual' but references processes of constructing normative and nonnormative behaviors and populations. The interaction of race, class, and gender in constructions of deviant sexualities creates more complicated groupings and hierarchies than the simple homosexual versus heterosexual dichotomy suggests, queer thus might also stand in opposition to *homonormative* formations […]. From this perspective it seems not only possible, but also useful to argue that Europeans of color are produced as 'queer,' 'impossible' subjects in heteronormative discourses of nation as well as migration. (xxxv)

While the creole resists classification as a singular racial or ethnic identity, it is a racialized, and in a European context, minoritized construction that may be produced as "queer" in a similar manner.[36] In my readings of the literary texts in my dissertation, I will also consider queered evocations of sexuality that is counter-normative, taboo, criminalized, and considered "dangerous" to the ideological constructs of the nation through the refusal of normative reproduction. These are not limited to same-sex intimacy, but also include sex work, abortion, and interracial sexuality.

[36] While my application of queer theory to the figure of the creole relates to queer diaspora studies and particularly draws on intersections between queer theory and Black studies, representation of the creole is different because while it can include diasporic identities, "creole" is not by itself a diasporic identity as it does not signify a single racial or ethnic identity. That said, while not exclusively signifying a Black identity, creole does maintain particular associations with Blackness as a racializing term. Nadia Ellis defines a queer Black diasporic practice in "emphasiz[ing] the structural queerness of black global modes of belonging over particular sexual or erotic practices" (5) by engaging in a study of figures "who represent an urgent desire for an outside—an outside of the nation, an outside of empire, an outside of traditional forms of genealogy and family relations, an outside of chronological and spatial limitations" through "features of longing, non-fulfillment, and suspension" (3-4). In examining the creole as a queer construct, like Ellis, I examine ways in which this representation challenges and transgresses national and geographic borders through the expression of non-normative desires.

Several scholars have produced studies of queerness in Caribbean literature, arguing for a nuanced understanding of sexuality in the Caribbean.[37] These studies have responded to some Anglophone Caribbean countries legislation criminalizing homosexuality, largely due to the history of British Colonialism and imposition of British law, by demonstrating that queerness can be part of Caribbean identities and is not a foreign or colonial imposition.[38] In fact, the exportation of anti-sodomy laws to British colonies where there was not necessarily a prior identity category of queer that was classified as criminal or deviant demonstrates that the processes of colonialism has constructed the category of the queer in the Anglophone Caribbean. Alison Donnell and Denise de Caires Narin in particular argue for a consideration of queerness alongside creolization in the context of Caribbean literature. While my consideration of the creole extends beyond the Caribbean islands into Louisiana regionalism (also figured as creole within the US) and creole transpositions, migrations, and exchanges into the metropoles of Britain, France, and also the United States, I acknowledge that the cultural imaginary of the creole is deeply associated with the Caribbean. As Louisiana is situated along the US Gulf Coast in close proximity to the Caribbean, I extend this regional framing to include Louisiana, which will be the focus of Chapter One, and in doing so, argue for a broader consideration of the creole in United States contexts. That said, both Donnell and de Caires Narin offer theoretical paths to

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[37] Recent scholarship on queer Caribbean literature includes *Creolized Sexualities* by Alison Donnell (2021), *Thiefing Sugar* by Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley (2010), *Desire between Women in Caribbean Literature* (2013) by Keja Valens, and *Island Bodies* by Rosamond King (2014). While I'm not positioning my dissertation as exclusively a study of queer Caribbean literature (as the geographic scope goes beyond the boundaries of the Caribbean), I am entering into a dialogue with these scholars in arguing for a queer theoretical approach in considering the representation of creole figures and engaging in queer readings of Caribbean literary texts.

[38] The current status LGBT rights in the Caribbean is entangled with the history of colonialism in complicated ways. Homosexuality is currently illegal in both Dominica and Jamaica, where Jean Rhys and Claude McKay respectively were from. This is also the case in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Saint Lucia, also former British colonies. Several other Anglophone Caribbean countries only recently legalized homosexuality. These include Trinidad and Tobago (2018), Barbados (2022), Antigua and Barbuda (2022), and Saint Kits and Nevis (2022). In contrast, Martinique and Guadeloupe remain part of France as Départements d'Outre-Mer, and thus are governed by French law in which same-sex marriage became legal in 2013.

thinking the queer and the creole together that have the potential to expand beyond the scope of their studies of the Anglophone Caribbean. De Caires Narin cautions that "Both *Creole* and *queer* are capacious but slippery terms; as critical tools, they are deployed widely and variously and not without contention" (196). While it is easy to analogize the two through their evocations of hybridity, transgression of boundaries and normativity, and conceptual expansiveness, doing so also risks an overextension of these terms to the point where they lose the specificity needed to impart theoretical weight.[39] De Caires Narin offers a methodology for a queer and creolized reading that takes on both of these categories' refusal of definitional boundaries as a theoretical tool:

> a creolizing reading requires a more open, tentative, and piecemeal approach: one that takes more liberties with history; does not seek to fix meanings in a particular kind of Caribbean *body* or in the "evidence" of an author's race (or sexuality); is open to the contradictions and anxieties that often (always?) mark a text; and is willing to recognize even the most fleeting glimpses of creolizing potential. (200)

In extending de Caires Narin's methodology for a queer creolizing meaning, I read the texts in my dissertation through their queer and "creolizing potential" rather than seeking a fixedness to the identity categories attached to the authors (or their characters). Donnell's framework for a queer creole reading of Caribbean literature similarly explores moments of ambiguity, potential, and fluidity to examine "creolized sexualities":

> My argument is that literary depictions of creolized sexualities offer a distinct expressive modality in which sexual autonomy and fluidity overlap kaleidoscopically to unfasten the

[39] Despite this problem, de Caires Narin posits an ahistorical expansion of creolization modeled on the expansive nature of queer theory: "I am suggesting that we focus less on creolization as a process fixed by a particular history and chronology, one in which each difference is measured in numbers and dates, and opt for a more fluid calibration of differences that could/would recognize the mutability and endlessly shifting constellations of identity as they continuously unfold and refold. Informed by queering strategies, a creolizing approach might also call into question the continued presumption of the heterosexual and normative mode" (199). While I agree with de Caires Narin's framing of creolization as a process of "mutability" that "calls to question the continued presumption of the heterosexual and normative mode," my conceptual framing of the creole is not de-historicized but is emphatically grounded in histories of colonialism and slavery, which I argue extend into and haunt the present, following creolization theorists including Glissant, Vergès, and Lionnet and Shih. While this framing is not confined by specific dates as historical boundaries, it cannot be separated from an understanding of these histories.

> categories of hetero- and homosexuality and bring forward a plurality of possible desires and attachments embedded in Caribbeanness. (1)

While I don't conceptualize the creole as synonymous with "Caribbeanness" and my dissertation does not make a claim to an analysis of the specifics of Caribbean identities, Donnell's approach to examining how depictions of sexuality in creole contexts exceeds normative identity categories provides further methodological grounding for a queer reading of the creole to attend to, in Donnell's words, "the place of fluid erotics within the creole continuum" (18).[40] In extending Donnell and de Caires Narin's theoretical arguments, I too read the texts in my dissertation with attention to erotic possibility. I argue that in the figural representation of the creole in these texts there is also a deployment of queer erotic potential through the projection of counter normative desire and refusal of a normative heterosexual futurity that serves to reproduce the nuclear family and the ideal colonial or national subject. In the chapters that follow, I will build on queer, feminist, and postcolonial theories by Sara Ahmed and Françoise Vergès to argue that the maintenance and continuation of the (heterosexual) family acts in service of the perpetuation of the colonial state and suggest that the production of a queer creole potential can have an impetus that is "anticolonial."[41]

Beyond the queer associations of the creole as a fluid and hybrid identity, the geospatial framing of the creole as a category that operates across and outside of national borders provide a further queer dimension. This is furthermore enacted by use of Creole language and creolized

[40] Donnell also identifies the conceptual similarities in the creole and the queer in their resistance to singular identity categories and normative frameworks: "I argue for creolized and queer as intellectual kin in their mutual repudiation of inadequate binarisms (black/white, female/male, homo/hetero) through which difference is contained and normalized. By bringing together creolized sensibilities and mapping them within the same epistemological and ontological kinship networks, my aim is to provoke a critical reconsideration of the purchase and hold of sexual categorization within the Caribbean region, where the logics of classification, labeling, and static normalization have long been proven insufficient with regard to ethnic, cultural, and national belongings" (6).

[41] This is an extension of Tinsley's argument that I will engage in Chapter Three suggesting that the expression of a white woman's erotic desire for Black femininity can be "anticolonial" while falling short of revolutionary (79).

stylistics in the writing I examine. In expanding Gilroy's conception of the Black Atlantic, queer- and feminist-of-color critiques have argued that this space of rupture is also a queer space. Omise'eke Tinsley defines the Queer Black Atlantic as a place where Black bodies were forced into a violent fluidity and un-gendering that denied personhood, while at the same time allowing for a radical intimacy amongst Black shipmates:

> Yet regardless of whether intimate sexual contact took place between enslaved Africans in the Atlantic or after landing, relationships between shipmates read as queer relationships. Queer not in the sense of a "gay" or same-sex loving identity waiting to be excavated from the ocean floor but as a praxis of resistance. Queer in the sense of marking disruption to the violence of normative order and powerfully so: connecting in ways that commodified flesh was never supposed to, loving your own kind when your kind was supposed to cease to exist, forging interpersonal connections that counteract imperial desires for Africans' living deaths. […] Fomented in Atlantic crosscurrents, black queerness itself becomes a crosscurrent through which to view hybrid, resistant subjectivities — opaquely, not transparently. (Tinsley 199)

In Tinsely's critique, the queer is not necessarily liberatory, nor does it offer any mitigation for the traumatic forced migration into slavery and torture that occurred on the slave ships. A framing of these relations as queer allows, however, for a reading of resistance as occurring through sexual relations and interpersonal care between Black subjects. Christina Sharpe expands upon Tinsley's concept of the Queer Black Atlantic to argue that the space constructed as the Trans-Atlantic also offers up an understanding of the fluidity imposed upon Black bodies as a way of thinking the politics of identity in flux, including as this relates to gender and sexuality:

> What I am therefore calling the Trans*Atlantic is that s/place, condition, or process that appears alongside and in relation to the Black Atlantic but also in excess of its currents. I want to think Trans* in a variety of ways that try to get at something about or toward the range of trans*formations enacted on and by Black bodies. […] The asterisk speaks to a range of configurations of Black being that take the form of translation, transatlantic, transgression, transgender, transformation, transmogrification, transcontinental, transfixed, trans-Mediterranean, transubstantiation (by which process we might

> understand the making of bodies into flesh and then into fungible commodities while retaining the appearance of flesh and blood), transmigration, and more. (30)[42]

Sharpe's geographical framing of the Trans*Atlantic maintains a recognition of the residue of Black bodies being turned "into fungible commodities" through slavery, as does Tinsely's Queer Black Atlantic. To this, Sharpe adds a particular understanding of the processes of transgression and forced mobility that have structured this geography as they relate to gender. Tinsely and Sharpe's theories of the Queer Trans-Atlantic account for Black bodies as a site on which fungibility, and thus the queer, is enacted, and yet a queered relationality also becomes a source of resistance.

Along these lines, Creole language, like creole identity and geography, could also be understood as a queer language. As I will demonstrate in my readings of Creole language, dialect, and other queered deviations from normative linguistic form, language itself functions as a tool of resistance from this site of enforced fungibility, where the fluidity of linguistic colonization was both a source of violence and nevertheless allowed for understanding and intimacy to occur between enslaved people. Creole language operates, in the words of Tinsley, "opaquely, not transparently" through meanings obscured from and buried in Creole grammar in resistance to the colonial standard. The question of language and stylistics as queer goes beyond the use of a particular Creole language (although two of the writers included in my study, Drasta

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[42] Sharpe's formulation of the Trans*Atlantic anticipates Jessica Berman's interrogation of the question "Is the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?" Berman argues that "asking this question allows us to recognize the disruptive, critical energy of the prefix 'trans' and the slippages it marks out when paired with terms like 'nation.' It also highlights the specific valence of the term 'transnational,' as distinct from other current critical categories describing 'world,' 'global,' or even 'planetary' literature. Like the critique of the sex/gender system instigated by the 'trans' in transgender theory, the 'trans' in 'transnational, as I conceive it, serves to decenter the 'national tradition' as an object of inquiry, exploring texts in relation to other, transnational horizons of expectations, even while recognizing the importance of their local commitments" (220). As my project engages a transnational and transatlantic conceptualization of the creole, like Sharpe and Berman, I view this as also a productive space for a queer critique. While my conceptualization of the queer is more diffuse and less specific than the trans as it relates to transgender, a trans theory of fluidity and mobility is certainly a component of my understanding of the creole.

Houël and Claude McKay composed queer verse in Martinican and Jamaican Creole respectively). I argue that the use of Creole language and stylistics enters into a political and aesthetic construction of queered meanings that forge solidarities, ruptures from the normative, and the fluidity of categories, which are also features of modernist stylistics.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One, "The 'Eternal Feminine' of New Orleans and the Creole United States" begins with the figuration of the creole in nineteenth-century American literature, examining how this representation developed out of regionalist associations with Louisiana. Due to the figure of the creole's ambiguous and ambivalent associations, particularly in terms of race and ethnicity, literary representations of the creole allowed for an interrogation of the problematic of national identity following the US Civil War and the abolition of slavery. This chapter covers US-based creole representations located in Louisiana, particularly New Orleans, ranging from the poetry in *Les Cenelles* written in French by (exclusively male) free people of color prior to the abolition of slavery to Emma Lazarus's figuration of the Creole South in her poem "The South" following the end of the Civil War to the writing of Alice Dunbar Nelson at the *fin-de-siècle* that negotiates a temporal and generic boundary between nineteenth-century regionalism and modernism. Through a reading of these texts, I examine the production and association of a feminine excess with the racially ambiguous figure of the creole woman.

In Chapter Two, "The Gendering of French Antillean Modernity: The 'Female-Isle' and the 'Plant-Man,' Or From *Doudouism* to *Négritude*," I move to the context of writers from Martinique and Guadeloupe in the early twentieth century, with a particular focus on writing by French Antillean women that predates the modernist *négritude* movement instantiated by the

canonical male writers, Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, and Léopold Senghor. Much of French Antillean writing prior to Césaire has been classified through the genre of *doudouism*, which the *négritude* writers critiqued for its representation of an exoticized feminine and focus on the landscape. I read the poetry of the Martinican writer Drasta Hoüel (*Les Vies légères*, published in Paris in 1916) as engaging in a modernist aesthetics that complicates the traditional condemnation of *doudouism* by engaging in a queer feminine eroticization of the Antillean landscape. I also examine the affective problematization of heteronormative futurity that serves to integrate the racialized Creole woman into the perpetuation of the French nation in the French Antillean writer Suzanne Césaire's novel *Claire-Solange, âme africaine* (published in Paris in 1924).[43] Lacascade's novel is notable for positing a critique of French racism and colonialism that anticipates the *négritude* literary and intellectual movement over a decade before Aimé Césaire's first publication of *Cahier d'un retour au pays natale* in 1939.

Chapter Three, "Suspending the *Voyage*: Jean Rhys's Creole Feminine Geography," continues with an examination of the resistant potential of the refusal of heteronormative futurity, and thus the perpetuation of the colonial British State through a reading of Jean Rhys's novel *Voyage in the Dark* (1934). Dominican writer Jean Rhys is arguably the most recognizable figure of creole modernism due to her connections to canonical British modernists. Of the four stylistically modernist novels published during the interwar period, *Voyage* is the only one to feature an explicitly Creole protagonist. Alongside the queer erotic potential and refusal of heteronormative futurity figured in this novel through protagonist Anna Morgan's engagement in sex work, abortion, and projection of desire onto Black feminine figures, I also examine Rhys's

[43] Lacascade was born in Fort-de-France, Martinique. Her mother's family was Martinican, and her father's family was Guadeloupean. It is thus more accurate to describe her as French Antillean rather than situating her in relation to only one of the islands.

geographical transposition of the Caribbean onto the metropolitan space of London. Continuing with my interrogation of the queered potential of a feminine *doudouist* exploration of the Antillean landscape in Chapter Two, I will examine how Rhys enacts this desiring projection onto the locatedness of the Antilles and how this occurs alongside the eroticization of Black femininity in her writing. I argue that a similar transposition of the Antilles onto the European metropole occurs in her short stories published in *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (1927), which figure Dominica in relation to the French Caribbean through the metropolitan spaces of Paris and the French Riviera.[44]

Finally, I turn to Claude McKay's writing in and about Jamaica in my final chapter, "Claude McKay's Queer Creole Poetics." I first examine Claude McKay's first volumes of poetry, *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* (1912) published before he left Jamaica for the United States. These volumes feature a series of love poems to a male figure named "Bennie" and express queer erotic desire and produce gender ambiguity through a blend of Jamaican Creole-inflected dialect and canonical English literary form. I then turn to McKay's fictional writings set in Jamaica, his novel *Banana Bottom* and stories published in *Gingertown* that figure an imagined return to Jamaica that McKay was never able to undertake.[45] I argue that these narratives allow for the constitution of a feminine gendered space within Jamaica through the *bildungsroman* of *Banana Bottom*'s female protagonist Bita Plant and produce an unspoken queerness through evocations of taboo and criminalized sexual excess. This queered feminine space, however, is disrupted and rendered impermanent through McKay's autobiographical

[44] Rhys commonly uses the term "the Antilles" in her writing (as opposed to the West Indies). Her choice a term that is more common in French emphasizes Dominica's particular geographic proximity to Martinique and Guadeloupe (it is situated between these islands) as well as its shared history of French colonization before it became a British territory.

[45] McKay wrote *Banana Bottom* and *Gingertown* after having spent over twenty years away from Jamaica, which became a permanent exile when the British government banned McKay from returning to the Commonwealth due to his involvement in Communist politics.

police narratives and the suggestion of colonial surveillance that frame his literary reconstructions of Jamaica.

Through my readings of these creole modernist texts, I examine how creole language, stylistics, and representation not only participates in a modernist aesthetics, but in a disruption of colonial geographies, imperial biopolitics, and formations of racial and gendered categories as well. I thus consider how the creole is synonymous not only with racialization, but also with feminine excess, and through its violation of normative structures and societal codes, provides a queer gesture towards alternative desires and possibilities that imagine an outside to the colonial and national order. By traversing geographical, linguistic and cultural borders of the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean, Louisiana, and the British and French metropoles, I follow the fluid mobility of this concept to examine modernity as a transnational phenomenon. While recognizing the hybridity and sense of innovation encompassed in the creole, I challenge the absolute newness and rupture of modernity by locating these effects in the haunting residues of the colonial past that constructed the creole geographies of intimate and violent relation that my project delineates. Creole modernism is not always a revolution. Instead, it is a gesture of ambivalence produced through the conditions of modernity that reveals how the modern is structured by the haunting legacies of the past. The creole presents a queer, feminized, and racialized figure that disrupts narrative aesthetics and hegemonic ideological structures but operates in multivalent and incongruent directions rather than consolidating a single discursive position.

CHAPTER ONE

The "Eternal Feminine" of New Orleans and the Creole United States

> Night, and beneath star-blazoned summer skies
> Behold the Spirit of the musky South,
> A creole with still-burning, languid eyes,
> Voluptuous limbs and incense-breathing mouth:
> Swathed in spun gauze is she,
> From fibres of her own anana tree.
> — Emma Lazarus, "The South"

My dissertation originates from a reading of Emma Lazarus' poem "The South" (1878)[1] with an effort to understand what precisely this figuration of the feminine creole indexes in the context of Reconstruction-Era United States literature. Subsequent regionalist references in "The South" to "cypresses and slim palmetto trees" (9), the "everglades" (20), "bayous" (24), "the great-jawed alligator" (30), "sea islands" (43), and "plantations" (44) locate the creole with narrowing precision as a figure of the US South, the Gulf Coast, and Louisiana. In a United States context, the term "creole" has an immediate association with Louisiana, particularly pertaining to the inhabitants of Louisiana during the French colonial period and their descendants. Yet Lazarus' regionalist specificity mixes with an exoticizing Orientalist lexicon of "incense" (4) and "gauze" (5).[2] Published at the end of Reconstruction, the racializing language in this poem is compellingly vague, as the creole languishes while gazing upon the laboring "swart freemen" (43), yet is herself "Like some half-savage, dusky Indian queen" (49). These descriptions cast her as a figure of overdetermined racializing symbolism. She at once occupies the position of the elite white plantocracy and is racialized as Black (perhaps from the French colonial class of free people of color) and then later described as "Indian," as both an evocation

[1]First published in *Lippincott's Magazine*, 1878.
[2] While the etymology of the term "gauze" is unknown, one hypothesis mentioned in the *OED* is that this fabric was named for Gaza in Palestine, where it may have been produced. This possibility demonstrates a potential Orientalist association with this fabric.

of indigeneity and, in the sense of East Indian, transported to the atmosphere of orientalist fantasy Lazarus generates in the text.[3] In thus abstracting and spectacularizing the feminine creole as a figure of the US South, Lazarus demonstrates the absolute indeterminacy signified by this insistently feminine trope and places the feminine creole at the center of anxieties over racial identity and national belonging in the Postbellum United States cultural imaginary.

Turning to the New Orleans-focused regionalist writing of Alice Dunbar-Nelson at the *fin-de-siècle*, I find a similar overdetermined spectacularization of the creole feminine is imbued in Dunbar-Nelson's representation of the regional landscape and urban geography of New Orleans. This is most evident in Dunbar-Nelson's figuration of the "eternal feminine," a concept taken from Goethe's *Faust* (1832), through the figure of a creole girl emerging from the urban bayou in her short story "By the Bayou St. John" (1899).[4] In Dunbar-Nelson's writings, as in

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[3] Beyond further exoticizing the creole and recalling the perpetual foreignness of Louisiana, orientalist imagery was commonly ascribed to racialized feminine figures, particularly ones that were also creolized or associated with New Orleans. Emily Clark explains the prevalence of orientalist representations of the figure of the "quadroon," a racial category specifically associated with the class of free people of color in New Orleans: "Like the concubine in an oriental harem, the quadroon was the victim of a corrupt culture foreign to American values in the nonslave states. Through the trope of the quadroon, orientalism, which served as a rationale for nineteenth-century European colonialism, was yoked in America to the politics of abolition. After the Civil War, the quadroon became a vehicle for the exploration of race and the legacies of racism, and the association of New Orleans and its free women of color with the seraglio served a new function as the American imagination grappled with the city's place in a postemancipation nation" (133).

[4] J.M. van der Laan explains the concept of the "Eternal-Feminine" ("das Ewig-Weibliche"), which emerges at the end of *Faust*. While "certainly gendered as female," van der Laan argues, the "Eternal-Feminine" "is not defined by all the women or female figures who appear in the play" (39). Van der Laan continues to explain how Goethe presents this concept as a transcendent feminine divinity imparted only on specific feminine figures in *Faust*: "In addition the women of the last scene who prepare for the appearance of and are associated with the Eternal-Feminine—Magna Peccatriz, Mulier Samaritana, Maria Aegyptiaca, Una Poenitentium—convey sexuality, albeit illicit sexuality, but more important, repentance and forgiveness received, a repentance Faust never confessed, but a forgiveness he requires and receives from or through the feminine love expressed through the finale. As the sum of these highly symbolic women, the Eternal-Feminine represents forgiveness, renewal or rebirth, divinity, and harmonious union" (40). The association of this concept with Faust's lover Gretchen, who becomes pregnant outside of marriage after being seduced by Faust, and other biblical and mythological figures of "illicit sexuality," as van der Lan explains, also suggests a connection between the "Eternal-Feminine" and the figure of the prostitute as the ultimate container for prohibited feminine sexuality. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the racialized figure of the "quadroon" woman, a prevalent iteration of the New Orleans feminine creole in the nineteenth century, was cast as adjacent to a sex worker due to the system of *plaçage* in which young free women of color were compelled into situations of being mistresses, often financially supported, buy elite white men, whom they were considered eligible to marry due to their racial origins. These men often entered into legitimate marriages with elite white women while at the same time maintaining concubine arrangements with women of color. I will return to the categorical slippage

Lazarus's "The South," it is my contention that the creole feminine is not only a politicized figure of the region, but also queered through her associations with sex work, taboo sexuality, tragic indeterminacy, and foreignness, or ill-fittedness. This representation of the creole invokes larger cultural discourses that envision Louisiana, and particularly New Orleans, as perpetually foreign, yet part of the United States. In addition to this expansive definition of queer in my formulation of the spectacular and spectral feminine creole of New Orleans regionalism, I pose the more limited sense of the queer as same-sex desire and gender transgression in my reading of a coded alternate narrative of lesbian eroticism in Dunbar-Nelson's short story "Violets" (1895) and of the centrality of cross-dressing and gendered indeterminacy to the plot of "A Carnival Jangle" (1895, 1899).

In assessing Alice Dunbar-Nelson's figuration of a feminine creole tied to the geohistorical specificity of New Orleans, I also place her writings in dialogue with other nineteenth century representations of the feminine creole in the French-language writings of free men of color from New Orleans prior to and during the Civil War. In particular, I examine the poetry anthology *Les Cenelles* (1845), edited by Armand Lanusse, and short stories published in Afro-Creole literary journals and newspapers: "Un marriage de conscience" (A Marriage of Conscience) by Lanusse and "Marie" by an anonymous author, both published in the same issue of *L'Album Littéraire* in 1843, and "Simple histoire" (Simple Story) by Adolphe Duhart, published in *La Tribune* in 1865. By reading across these writings and putting Dunbar-Nelson's Anglo-Creole writing in the context of earlier Afro-Creole writing in French, I develop a reading of the creole feminine figuration of New Orleans regionalism as central to late Nineteenth century discourses on United States national identity following the Civil War. A comparative

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between the creole and the sex worker and the queered associations of both these figures in Chapter Three on Jean Rhys's writing.

reading of Francophone and Anglophone Afro-Creole texts is not common in the scholarship on nineteenth-century African American literature, perhaps due to linguistic differences and the already marginal position of New Orleans as exceptional within US Southern Regionalism. A comparative analysis of these works, however, is pertinent because Dunbar-Nelson and the writers published in *Les Cenelles* were all self-identified New Orleans Creoles of color, and thus negotiated the situation of cultural and linguistic creolization that is unique to New Orleans. This uniqueness historically produced a different structure of categories of racial identity stemming from the French colonial system that allowed for intermediacy and indeterminacy between the categories of white and Black, contrary to the binary "One Drop Rule" that legally instantiated racial identity in the rest of the US. To read French-language texts as American literature furthermore challenges constructs of the nation and re-situates an understanding of the US-located creole as transnationally constructed through overlapping French and Spanish colonialisms and ties to the Caribbean, particularly Haiti, as the 1791 revolution resulted in a wave of francophone refugees arriving in New Orleans from Saint-Domingue.[5]

While assessing the creole within the US literary tradition as a nineteenth-century regionalist figure may seem beyond the bounds of literary modernism, it is my argument that the gendered and racialized ambiguity, indeterminacy, and fungibility of this figure furnishes a notion of modernity that is carried into the twentieth century. Writing at the *fin-de-siècle* and later participating in the Harlem Renaissance, Alice Dunbar-Nelson is herself a transitional figure between nineteenth-century regionalism and African American modernism. In a US

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[5] Another significant wave of francophone migration to Louisiana occurred with the arrival of Accadian refugees who were expelled from New France (spanning the Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island) by the British colonists between 1755 and 1764. The descendants of Acadian refugees in Louisiana are now identified as "Cajuns," which constitutes a separate ethnic category from "Creole" (but could also be encompassed by this term).

cultural context, the figure of the creole is firmly tied to the region of Louisiana, while also presenting a source of modernist destabilization to the ideology of national unity. The creole thus reveals the disruptive potential of the ambiguity of identity categories that breaches the coherence of US nationalism. In *Southscapes*, Thadeus Davis argues that Louisiana has been ideologically constructed as perpetually foreign while nevertheless assimilated as a US State, making Louisiana regionalism a particular site of modernity: “With its geographic proximity to the Caribbean Islands and Latin and South America, Louisiana early symbolized difference from the American mainland norm along with racial and linguistic mixtures unfamiliar in much of the rest of the American South” (8). In describing the ways in which the regional geography and temporality of Louisiana in particular are “constitutive of modernism” (8), Davis suggests that the formulation of a creole identity from the histories of slavery, colonialism, and racialization has a particular resonance in New Orleans. The exoticization of New Orleans, and by extension the creole, as perpetually foreign rests in tension with the ways in which to label something as creole makes it emphatically a part of the Americas as opposed to Europe. And yet this abjection of the racialized and ethnicized other produced through American racial ideology is a prevalent undercurrent of American culture in which white supremacy requires the production and maintenance of categories of racial difference.

Demonstrating the creole figure’s relevance to notions of modernity, Edward Coleman’s modernist recovery scholarship on nineteenth-century Afro-Creole poetry in French posits creole New Orleans as paradoxically an anti-modernist relic and site of perpetual interest still relevant in the twentieth century. In 1945, Coleman published an anthology of French-language poetry by Afro-Creole writers titled *Creole Voices* in which he included a reprint of the original versions of poems published in *Les Cenelles*, organized by author and prefaced with a short biography of

each author. While Coleman's "Preface" to this volume presents a dated and occasionally romanticized view of creole Louisiana, as a work of modernist recovery scholarship, his "Preface" demonstrates how the nineteenth century francophone Creole occupied a tenuous place in modernity as a figure of both aspirational fascination and of the anti-modern, romantic, and regional.[6] Coleman begins by extolling the fascination of discovery of this supposedly forgotten strain of African American literature: "During the last three decades there has been a decided increase in the interest shown by students and the reading public in general in the contributions of the Negro to American life." (Coleman ix) This modernist fascination with the interrogation and production of Blackness then transfers to a particular interest in creole Louisiana, particularly in the ways in which it is viewed as antithetical to modernity:

> Louisiana has long held a unique fascination for those Americans who are interested in the charm, romance, drama, and heroism of early American life. […] Simply to mention Carnival, Marie Le Veau, the Evangeline country, Chalmette, Nachitoches (sic), Creoles, and the Vieux Carré is more than enough to start an almost endless chain of priceless memories of incidents, stories and scenes (Coleman ix-x)

[6] Coleman continues to provide a definition of "creole" that, like many others, invokes racialization without being able to situate the "creole" in a single racial classification: "Of all the ethnic groups which may be found in Louisiana it is, no doubt, true that no other single group has been more often the object of general interest than the group which is generally called the "Creole." Much has been written by various persons having sought, for one reason or another, to define the term "Creole" and to describe and trace the ethnic and historical origins of those elements of the population here and in other lands which fit into this classification. […] It is the idea that whatever racial elements are combined to produce the "Creole," Negro blood must *not* be included in the mixture" (x).While his insistence on the whiteness of the creole seems definitive in this passage, he immediately shifts from this statement to define the creole instead in relation to Blackness and the management of differences in antebellum and French colonial Black identities: "It should be remarked, moreover, that as slavery became deeply rooted in Louisiana after the purchase by the United States and the free people of African blood came under the ban of the fastidious slaveholding aristocracy, certain of those of this element of Negro blood undertook to make a distinction in the use of the term. Those people of color with such little infusion of African blood that they could all but pass for white and who supplied white men from the octoroon balls and other festivities with sweethearts, concubines, and sometimes wives when the infatuation became deepened and intensified […]—these thus favored joined with others to restrict the application of the term *Creole* to their class only and to designate other free persons of color as *free blacks*. Yet thousands of Negroes in Haiti and Louisiana call themselves Creoles without regard to any of these fine distinctions" (Coleman xi). Coleman's definition of creole thus becomes one of difference and distinction, operating through a repetition of the implied "*not*" while also being located within the regional and temporal specificity of antebellum Louisiana, which a modern audience cannot fully access and thus requires scholarly interpretation.

Cast as “memories of incidents, stores and scenes,” these representations of creole Louisiana are rooted in the past and the realm of myth, implicitly opposed to a conception of the modern. Yet the “unique fascination” of Louisiana paradoxically carries its relevance into the twentieth century where this “almost endless chain” of “memories of incidents, stories and scenes” posits creole Louisiana as a continuing source of narrative and discursive inspiration, marking it as surprisingly perpetually novel (being rediscovered) in the era of modernity. My analysis of “creole modernism” in the US context thus begins with the nineteenth-century proliferation of the creole figure to index a nascent sense of modernity and rupture that refers back to an imagined construction of the postbellum US.

The “Eternal Feminine” Landscape and the Spectacularized Spectral Feminine Creole

In returning to Emma Lazarus’ spectacularization of the feminine creole as an overdetermined figure for the US south, I argue that from a non-regional US perspective, the figure of the creole raises anxieties over a US national identity in the aftermath of the Civil War and abolition of slavery (1865). These anxieties emerge both in terms of the south’s reintegration into the union and concerns over a national racial identity due to a large population of former slaves gaining the claim to full citizenship following the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment (1868). In *Imagined Communities*, discussed in my introduction, Benedict Anderson interprets American nationalism through a (white) creole identification against the empire, leading to the creation of “creole states, formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent with those against whom they fought” (47). In *Creole America*, also discussed in my introduction, Sean Goudie builds on Anderson’s argument to posit the centrality of a creole identity to a US national imaginary. As Goudie demonstrates, while the term “creole”

could simply refer to any person of European (or African) descent born in the American colonies, the notion of the creole brought up discourses of racial degeneracy and contamination through contact, which required the abjection of the creole in order to maintain fantasies of white racial purity:

> Even as they understood their creole status, the British colonists in North America, both before and after independence, were highly anxious about being contaminated by the cultural and racial associations of the term "creole" as deployed in discourses of creole degeneracy about the New World. (Goudie 9)

Yet at the same time, the American colonists were themselves creoles, constructing a nationalist ideology through the rejection of Britishness. As Goudie explains, this simultaneous validation and abjection of a creole identity was thus central to a US notion of "Americanness":

> As the United States sought to substitute a liberating creole identity for an oppressive colonial one, creole uplift, whether undertaken by Hamilton or Jefferson, required ever-increasing sleights of hand in order to repress, through actual and epistemological violence, the formation of inter-American, cross-cultural identities inside and outside the nation's borders. (9)

This leads Goudie to argue that "the shadowy presence of creole American identities underlies anxious efforts to construct exceptional U.S. 'American' identities" (9). From a US national perspective, the figuration of the creole thus remains an absent presence that, while employed as a construct of the foreign other, also rebounds as a symbol of the self, containing the very anxieties and tensions at the core of a US-American national ideology.

While not a New Orleans regionalist, Lazarus herself was also not a figure of American nationalism as a Jewish New Yorker and activist aiding refugees from the pogroms. Lazarus is best known her poem "The New Colossus" (1883), commissioned to raise funds for the construction of the Statue of Liberty and added to the statue on a plaque in 1903, after her death. While not representing a creole figure specifically, "The New Colossus" presents Lady Liberty as another spectacularized feminine figure and personification of the US nation. The first stanza

of "The South," quoted as this chapter's epigraph, reveals both the foreignness and Americanness of the creole figure of the South, evoking *The Star-Spangled Banner* with the explosive presence of the "star-blazened summer skies" (1).[7] As discussed above, the regionalist references in the poem's language situate this creole figure in Louisiana, using language that is both regionally specific and evocative of a foreign exotic. The term "anana tree" (6), for example, provides a sense of the foreign, "anana" being derived from the French word for pineapple, *ananas*, while also pointing to the regional specificity of Louisiana's francophone population, the foreign contained within the national. As previously stated, I read the racially ambiguous language Lazarus uses to describe the creole as negotiating US cultural anxieties over racial identity in the context of Reconstruction. The racialization of this figure culminates in the suggestion of her indigeneity, which further allows her to personify a sense of Americanness: "Yet now how listless and how still she lies, /Like some half-savage, dusky Indian queen, / Rocked in her hammock 'neath her native skies" (50-51). While I interpret Lazarus's use of the term "Indian" as having a dual orientalist and American indigenous signification, the creole's positioning in her "hammock," an object presumed to have originated in American indigenous cultures, beneath "her native skies" emphasizes her construction as native to the regional space. I will return to a discussion of ideological discourses of creole indigeneity that make claims for creole sovereignty while positing a settler colonialist erasure of continued indigenous presence, following Shona Jackson's framework cited in my introduction, with my reading of evocations of indigeneity in *Les Cenelles*. Lazarus' representation of the Native creole is, however, different from the political claims to indigeneity made by the descendants of slaves to procure civil rights and recognition. The description of Lazarus' figure racializes her as "dusky" and "half-savage"

[7] Lyrics to *The Star-Spangled Banner* were written by Francis Scott Key in 1814, originally published under the title "Defence of Fort M'Henry" describing a battle witnessed during the War of 1812.

to provide a suggestion of indigenous identity contained within the creole that is exotic, foreign, and not entirely assimilable under US imperialism. This containment of identity may render her a partially colonized figure, but her emphatic association with the regional landscape suggests an element of indigeneity that resists absorption into the US nation, again problematizing her position as a national subject.

In addition to the racializing associations of "creole" and ambiguous hints at her darker skin tone, this figure of the South is endowed with a decadent femininity that is also racialized through her excessive leisure and exotic surroundings. She thus fits the trope of feminized creole indolence demonstrated in the French dictionary definitions of *créole* cited in my introduction. From the first stanza, she occupies a position of leisure that is both spectacularized, with the blazing stars, and sexualized through her evocative languishing. She lounges with "Voluptuous limbs" (4) in her "hammock," scantily clothed in "gauze" (5) constructed "From fibres of her own anana tree" (6), a description which aligns the exotic fruit with her sexualization. Her languishing pose is suggestive of both sexuality and a decadent laziness, while she is waited on by "swart freemen" who "bend / Bronzed backs in willing labor" (44-45). The "willing labor" of "freemen" recalls the forced labor of slavery, obliquely condemning the decadence of white Southern slaveholders. Descriptions of her body merge into a representation of the Louisiana landscape and double the spectacular with the spectral, framing her hovering as a ghostly presence:

> How beautiful she is! A tulip-wreath
> Twines round her shadowy, free-floating hair:
> Young, weary, passionate, and sad as death,
> Dark visions haunt for her the vacant air,
> While movelessly she lies
> With lithe, lax, folded hands and heavy eyes.
>
> Full well knows she how wide and fair extend

Her groves bright-flowered, her tangled everglades,
Majestic streams that indolently wend
Through lush savanna or dense forest shades,
Where the brown buzzard flies
To broad bayou 'neath hazy-golden skies. (13-24)

The exclamation of “How beautiful she is!” (13) insists on her allure through feminine excess, while her lounging pose, “caressed: / 'Twixt cypresses and slim palmetto trees” (9), sexualizes her demeanor. The natural features described alongside her become extensions of her decadent sexuality: “Her groves bright-flowered, her tangled everglades” (20), is followed by additional sensual descriptions, “luxuriant woods” (32), “the savage splendor of the swamp” (25), “warm, furtive breezes faint and damp” (27), all evoking an overgrowth of vegetation and saturation of water in which her body is continuous with the overripened landscape. Lazarus’ descriptive language in itself performs a feminized excess in providing a multiplicity of modifiers (four adjectives modify the noun “breezes” in the quotation above: “warm,” “furtive,” “faint,” and “damp”).

In Lazarus’ description, the spectacular slips into the spectral, evoking a sense of death and haunting and figuring the feminine creole as a ghostly presence: “Young, weary, passionate, and sad as death / Dark visions haunt for her the vacant air.” Lazarus’ simile comparison of the creole to “death” and suggestion of haunting visions lends a ghostly signification to the description of her floating in the hammock: “While movelessly she lies / With lithe, lax folded hands and heavy eyes.” The adjective “movelessly” suspends this figure outside of time while the paradoxical description of her hands as both “lithe” and “lax” builds on this sense of suspension to posit the creole as a continuous haunting presence imbued in the regional geography. Lazarus thus posits the feminine creole as a continued ghostly presence, a remainder of that which cannot be contained. This sense of the creole as a residual haunting in the

(post)colonial space evokes the spectral residues of slavery and genocide that structured the space of Louisiana, alongside the entirety of the Americas. In *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach formulates a definition of circum-Atlantic memory that is grounded in histories of slavery and colonial violence:

> The concept of a circum-Atlantic world (as opposed to a transatlantic one) insists on the centrality of the diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas, North and South, in the creation of the culture of modernity. In this sense, a New World was not discovered in the Caribbean, but one was truly invented there. Newness enacts a kind of surrogation—in the invention of a new England or a new France out of the memories of the old—but it also conceptually erases indigenous populations […] While a great deal of the unspeakable violence instrumental to this creation may have been officially forgotten, circum-Atlantic memory retains its consequences, one of which is that the unspeakable cannot be rendered forever inexpressible: the most persistent mode of forgetting is memory imperfectly deferred (Roach 4)

Notable in this definition is the way in which modernity and newness serve to manage traumatic loss. In "retain[ing] the consequences" of genocide, erasure, and violence, creole modernity thus, following Roach's definition, engenders innovation and hybridization through the atemporality and perpetuation of these histories, enabling the creole figure to be paradoxically both modernizing and untimely, or seemingly anachronistic.

Alluding to the context of the Reconstruction of the US South following the Civil War, Lazarus positions her creole figure as a symbol of the decadent decay of the region. The "dream of empire" stands parallel to sin, suggesting the failure of the Confederacy, or more broadly American colonialism, and yet the languor of The South makes her an empty vessel of sorts who might feel the "fever" or draining of defeat, yet remains unmarked, unchanged, "one who slow doth win," and imperturbably the same. It is, in fact, the emancipated Black population that seems to redeem The South, facilitating, her luxuriating stasis in which defeat is never really felt. And furthermore, emancipation is what justifies her recovery and makes her glorious, ready to rise again as a figure that can propel the nation into the prosperous future, whose "aims shall be

subserved with boundless wealth." And yet this victory hinges on the labor of the recently freed former slaves, for the wealth extracted from the land is derived "From broad plantations where swart freemen bend / Bronzed backs in willing labor." While she herself is unassimilable and uncontainable, she is the vehicle by which Reconstruction politics arrives at the idealization of emancipated "freemen" renewing the spirit of national futurity with the provision of "boundless wealth" made more glorious by their "willing labor." "The South" herself refuses assimilation, languishing upon the racialized labor of others.

The decadent excesses of the feminine creole in "The South" verges into a queered hyperbolic femininity as her gendered presence is spectacularized to an extreme. In the final stanza, the poem resolves with her rising, **"**And SHE hath wakened" (60), as "the dawn" "Glimmers" (58). This sense of rising with the sun returns to the blazing celestial imagery of the first stanza and places extreme emphasis on her gendered presence through the capitalization of "SHE." In addition to the evocations of her eroticized decadence, her excessive display of femininity renders this figure potentially queer through her position as excess.[8] Lazarus' poem "Carmela," published in Lippincott's magazine in 1875 uses similar language an imagery to describe a more overtly erotic encounter with a woman. In "Carmela," the creole south is exchanged for "Mexico" (3). The racialized figure of "Carmela" echoes the creole's "languid eyes" (3) and "listless" pose (50):

> O love, my love! Who lov'st not me:
> Here didst thou gain the witchery
> Of Southland languor, Spanish grace,
> And emerald eyes' arch coquetry. (12-15)

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[8] There has been some scholarly speculation that Lazarus was queer. Biographer Esther Schor suggests that Lazarus may have been bisexual based on a reading of her poems, such as "Assurance" that portray erotic situations involving women. According to Shor, "'Assurance' is not a poem about choosing a lover; it is about being chosen by desire— erotic desire, and for the body and soul of a woman. It is a love poem, yes, but also a poem of vocation, about being called by eros to a vital, sexual life" (233).

Carmela is positioned similarly to the creole, “within thy hammock rocked / Beneath the odorous cedar trees —” (41-42). Although Carmela’s ethnicity is specified, her racial heritage remains ambiguous as her “emerald eyes” suggest European ancestry, but her dark complexion (and foreign status) would situate her outside the normative parameters of whiteness in nineteenth-century America:

> Thy sisterhood is darkly fair,
> With glowing cheek and night-black curls:
> Thy pure flesh hath the sheen of pearls
> In waves of light thy loosened hair
> Its waves of light thy loosened hair
> Its warm gold to thy feet unfurls. (16-20)

This stanza implies a surreal seeming racial duality as Carmela’s “night-black curls” are let loose to reveal blonde hair underneath, a sort of dreamlike correction to the threat of interracial or interethnic desire, perhaps associated with Carmela’s “witchcraft.” While the trope of the racialized “foreign” woman “enchanting” the white Western subject is nothing new, the queer aspect of a poetess eroticizing a feminine subject subverts the traditional representation of the exotic foreign women. Lazarus’ erotic gaze upon Carmela thus pushes up against the taboo of same-sex eroticism, perhaps using this trope and the ensuing language of magic and fantasy as a distraction from the taboo sexuality. The repeated refrain of “Carmela,” “My curse would blight thee yet, beware / I know the secret of your birth / The secret of your life I share” (28-30, 103-105) places the poetic voice into an intimate symmetry with Carmela, the implication of a secret still hidden from the reader further suggesting the erotic and taboo. The “curse” the poetic voice would impart upon Carmela remains unclear, but seems to be transferred through erotic contact,

perhaps a metaphorical extrapolation of queer desire.[9] "The South" differs from "Carmela" by not giving an individual, personalizing name to its spectacularized feminine figure, and thus does not seem to represent an actual human but rather an overdetermined personification of the region and cultural anxieties attached to it. The ability of Lazarus' feminine figures (the creole south, Lady Liberty, Carmela), who index a geographic region or the nation, to take on a queered and gendered excess is illustrative of a spectacularized and disruptive femininity that also destabilizes conceptions of national, ethnic, and regional identity. When examined in the regionalist framework of Alice Dunbar-Nelson's writing, the feminine creole presents a similar source of queered excess and disruption. With Dunbar-Nelson's mapping of the "eternal feminine" onto the geography of the bayou, the figure of creole femininity manifests an ambiguous sense of spectral ruin that coincides with her overdetermined and queered presence.

Dunbar-Nelson was born Alice Ruth Moore in New Orleans in 1875. She was a self-identified biracial creole whose mother had been enslaved.[10] Dunbar-Nelson took the last name of her first husband, renowned African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, whom she married in 1898. Dunbar was allegedly violently abusive to his wife, and they permanently separated in 1902 before his death from tuberculosis in 1906. Despite their tumultuous and abusive

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[9] Zachary Turpin argues for claiming Lazarus as a "queer poet" based in part on a reading of "Carmela" alongside other poems that erotically represent women which Turpin identifies as "confident, public expressions of queer desire" (421)

[10] Akasha Gloria Hull characterizes Dunbar-Nelson's social affiliation with New Orleans Creole society based on her multiracial status: "with this background, she assumed a prominent place in the racially mixed Creole society of postbellum New Orleans" (*Color* 45). According to Hull's biography, Alice Dunbar-Nelson was descended from enslaved people on her mother's side, but her family chose to claim origins amongst the Creole free people of color in Louisiana: "Dunbar-Nelson would much rather have been taken as a descendent of Louisiana's (preferably free) *gens de couleur*, those mixed-blood, "colored" people who considered themselves superior to pure Negros, especially those who had been slaves" (34). Hull furthermore describes Dunbar-Nelson as white-passing due to her multiracial heritage: "Alice was born with reddish-blonde curls that darkened to red to auburn, and was fair enough to "pass" for white. Given her mother's black and American Indian blood, she seems to have received considerably more Caucasian influence from her father" (34). With the "one-drop rule" deeply ingrained in American culture at the time, however, Dunbar-Nelson would have likely been seen as Black by those who knew her ancestry, and in her personal life, she appears to have aligned herself with a Black identity, marrying Paul Laurence Dunbar, who had a darker skin tone and could not have passed for white.

relationship, Dunbar-Nelson remained invested in Dunbar's literary legacy after his death, while also continuing her own career as a writer, journalist, teacher, and Black feminist activist. She remarried twice, taking the name of her third husband, Robert Nelson, in hyphenation with Dunbar's. Dunbar-Nelson's literary New Orleans regionalist writing consists of two volumes: *Violets and Other Tales*, a compilation of short fiction, poems, and essays published in 1895 before she met Dunbar, and *The Goodness of Saint Rocque and Other Stories*, a volume of short stories published in 1899.[11] Akasha Gloria Hall's extensive archival research on Dunbar-Nelson indicates that *The Goodness of Saint Rocque* was intended by the publisher to be a "companion volume" to Paul Lawrence Dunbar's *Poems of Cabin and Field*, also published in 1899 (Hull *Color* 49).[12] Dunbar-Nelson's regionalist representation of New Orleans in the stories of *Saint Rocque* therefore should also be read against Dunbar's complicated portrayal of the spectral presence of the decaying plantation in this volume.

Paul Laurence Dunbar, born in Dayton, Ohio, also to parents who were formerly enslaved, produces a form of Southern US regionalism in his *Poems of Cabin and Field* by figuring the rural postbellum US South through the ghostly presence of the slave plantation as a continuing remainder of slavery that will forever haunt the American landscape. The first section of this volume, "The Deserted Plantation" casts the plantation manor as entirely abandoned by the white planters and slaveholders while former slaves continue to occupy the defunct quarters and fields:

> An' de big house stan's all quiet lak an' solemn,
> Not a blessed soul in pa'lor, po'ch, er lawn ;
> Not a guest, ner not a ca'iage lef' to haul 'em,
> Fu' de ones dat tu'ned de latch-string out air gone. (17)

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[11] *Saint Rocque* republished three of the short stories from *Violets*: "A Carnival Jangle," "Little Miss Sophie," and "Titée," with substantial revisions to "Titée."

[12] Dunbar-Nelson also dedicated *The Goodness of Saint Rocque* to her husband, referring to him as "My best Comrade." Dunbar's *Poems of Cabin and Field* is not, however, dedicated to his wife.

[…]
Gone ! not one o’dem is lef’ to tell de story ;
    Dey have lef’ de deah ol’ place to fall away.
Could n’t one o’ dem dat seed it in its glory
    Stay to watch it in de hour of decay ? (25)

While Dunbar’s verse can be read as staging a nostalgia for the antebellum slave plantation and reducing former slaves to the stereotypes of minstrelsy for the white audience with whom he was immensely popular, this poem also offers a double reading of celebrating the dissolution of the plantation and disappearance of the white slaveholders. The tone is mournfully nostalgic, with the antebellum days of slavery characterized as “glory,” but the exclamation of “Gone !” could also be read as celebration rather than lament. In an alternate reading, the desertion of the white slaveholders results in their lack of a poetic and historical voice: “not one o’dem is lef’ to tell de story,” which leaves the role of speech, memory and storytelling to the former slaves who have remained to reappropriate and repossess the place. Gavin Jones characterizes Dunbar’s dialect poetry as positing these doubled meanings of on the one hand, accommodation of a racist nostalgia for the lost cause, and on the other, a resistant parody of white productions of minstrelsy. Jones describes Dunbar as “a black man parodying what was predominantly a white literary parody of black speech with the mixed results of both confirming racial conventions and refiguring them, from within, with his vernacular black difference” (207).[13] According to Jones, Dunbar’s construction of his plantation poems through memory, through the limited perspective of “a solitary rememberer” (198) in the case of “The Deserted Plantation,” emphasizes “the artificiality of plantation nostalgia” (195). Dunbar’s verse in *Cabin and Field* is accompanied by

[13] Nadia Nurhussein expands on Jones’ scholarship on Paul Laurence Dunbar’s dialect poetry. Nurhussein points out that Dunbar, being from Ohio, was not an “authentic” speaker of Southern-US dialect and therefore characterizes Dunbar’s dialect poetry as “an imaginary Southern black dialect of an idealized recent past, calling to mind and seemingly derived in part from white writers” (94). The context of Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s New Orleans regionalism is, of course, different since she was from New Orleans.

haunting photographs of the deserted plantation and the southern landscape in alternation with photographs of former slaves who continue to occupy the space, instantiating a continued Black presence in the absence of the white slaveholders. This creates a sense of celebration of the disappearing of the white planters mixed with a nostalgic lament over the plantation's desertion, casting the plantation as a site of absence nevertheless inhabited by the spectral presence of the (former) slaves. The remaining former slaves imbue the space with the residue of their presence and remainder of the persistent violence of slavery that reverberates in the haunted geography of the US South.

Writing in dialect in late nineteenth-century US literary culture, as Jones explains, constituted a movement referred to as "the cult of the vernacular" and "was judged to be the most significant literary event of its generation" (1). The popularity of dialect in this era further raises the question of writing in Creole language, and by extension the presence of other "foreign" languages within the American literary tradition, such as French-language literature from Louisiana. While Dunbar-Nelson does not write as extensively in dialect as her first husband, her regionalist short stories do feature dialect that mixes creole French in a form that is more ethicized and regionalized than racialized. While several of her characters are coded as Black or racially mixed with descriptions of their "darker" features, Dunbar-Nelson does not often explicitly identify race. Her creole dialect-speaking characters rather seem to pertain to a lower class as opposed to the high society of ball attendees. For example in Dunbar-Nelson's titular story of her second volume, "The Goodness of Saint Rocque," the central character Manuela is racialized and ethnicized through her "dark eyes" and Spanish name in opposition to her romantic rival Claralie, who is described as "blond and petite," called "dat light gal" by the

voodoo priestess.[14] Manuela consults the priestess to regain the love of Theophile who has left her for Claralie. Voodoo is itself a spiritual practice associated with Blackness, and the description of the priestess as "yellow" implies her Black heritage: "a little, wizened, yellow woman, who, black-robed, turbaned, stern, sat before an uncertain table whereon were greasy cards." Like Lazarus's poetic figure of the creole, this description blends regionalist racial and ethnic signifiers with an exoticizing orientalism through her "turban" and use of tarot cards.[15] Of the characters in this story, she is the only one to speak in a creolized, French inflected dialect. She begins the session, for example, by saying to Manuela, "An' fo' w'y you come here? Assiez-la, ma'amzelle." Dunbar-Nelson's use of dialect is itself a creolization, mixing common orthographies used for Black dialect by both white and Black US writers with French and Creole language (*assiez-là* means "take a seat" in French and "ma'amzelle" is a Creole phoneticization of *mademoiselle*). The priestess continues, instructing Manuela in the cartomancy, "Now you cut dem in t'ree part, so—un, deux, trois, bien! You mek' you' weesh wid all you' heart, bien!" In addition to the exclamations in French, the dialect here seems to also convey a French accenting of English, with the difficulty of pronouncing the "th" sound not occurring in French and the vowel shift of "weesh" reflecting a French phonetics. In a discussion of white writers mimicking Gullah language (an English-based Creole), Jones argues that the foreignness of US Creole languages was perhaps even more threatening to a white Anglo-American nationalism than an Anglo-African American dialect:

> Black language was a powerfully disruptive force because its relation to white English was both generative and undermining. Mixed with white language, black language had

[14] Dunbar-Nelson's representation of Voodoo in this story further illustrates the cultural creolization of this practice through its mix with French-influenced Catholicism. The priestess ultimately instructs Manuela to visit St. Rocque's Chapel (Saint Roch Chapel) and light candles and perform novena prayers while wearing a Voodoo charm to impel Theophile's return.

[15] Although likely of European origin, tarot has cultural associations with the Romani people and with Eastern spirituality.

> produced a distinctive, hybrid southern accent yet had still retained the power of resistance in its ambiguous, rhetorical rituals that lay partially beyond white comprehension […] In the linguistic politics of representing Gullah, however, literature supported ideological attempts to master the ambiguous otherness and influence of creole English by suggesting its familiarity and difference simultaneously. (108)

Jones summarizes the motivations of white southern writers in producing racialized creole writing: "Dialect writing was often a reaction against, if not an attempt to correct, the presence of creolization in southern culture." (107) As a Black writer from New Orleans, Dunbar-Nelson was not in a position of anxiously attempting to contain and master racialized difference construed as "foreign," but rather writing out of her *own* positionality and experience. Her sporadic use of a French inflected creole language does, however, point to a more radical resistant potential in claiming a creole identity. Jones continues, arguing that the specter of racial and linguistic contamination always underlies the presentation of creole linguistic difference within the US region:

> behind demeaning treatments of Gullah's otherness lay the haunting idea that, while it remained partially unintelligible to whites, Gullah still had the ability to contaminate southern English with a possibly African component—the idea, in other words, that Gullah was both a creole language *and* reflective of a creolized cultural situation. (104)

The threat of a US creole language is thus not just confined to the coastal regions where Gullah is spoken or to French creole Louisiana. It is the haunting possibility of these small regions contaminating the entire nation in which the construction of identity is premised on a whitened construct of Anglo-Americanness.[16]

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[16] Jones explains that American English became a source of cultural anxiety in the postbellum era for much the same reasons as racial and ethnic identity. To the fragility of whiteness following the Civil War, Jones adds additional socio-economic concerns of this era that destabilized national ideology, particularly the large waves of non-Anglo European immigration to northern cities: "American English became the subject of political controversy over the quality of national culture in an age that saw a broad and well-recognized series of historical developments: the growth of large-scale industrial capitalism, with its vast inequalities of wealth and poverty; the formation of large urban centers; post-slavery race segregation; the enormous influx of new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe; the foundation of nationwide networks of communication; and simultaneously the heightened awareness of America as a heterogeneous society divided along lines of ethnicity race, and class" (9).

If Dunbar-Nelson's volume *The Goodness of Saint Rocque* is to be taken as a "companion" to her first husband's *Cabin and Field*, her work constructs a very different figure of the regional US through the locale of New Orleans. Unlike with traditional southern regionalism in American literature, New Orleans based regionalism is distinct in not figuring the rural in opposition to the metropole, but rather presenting an alternative formulation of the urban and cosmopolitan that challenges the imaginary of what constitutes the "American" national through the perpetual "foreignness" of New Orleans. It is significant that while the US figuration of the creole indexes Louisiana as a whole, including the rural zones and the plantation, this symbolic remains inextricably tied to the transnational urban setting of New Orleans with its vestiges of multilingualism and other prior colonial nationalities. This all makes writing about the geographic space of New Orleans/Louisiana distinct from the typical notion of US southern regionalism. In their analysis of the genre of regionalism in American writing in *Writing Out of Place*, Judith Fetterly and Marjorie Pryse argue that the opposition of the peculiarities of the region in relation to the national norm align the regional with the category of the queer: "The cultural, linguistic, and regional differences that characterize these [regionalist] subjects render them 'queer' to urban readers" (281). While New Orleans is not oppositional to the urban, it constitutes a site of linguistic and cultural difference that is non-assimilable into the norms of Anglo-American nationalism. Fetterly and Pryse argue that this marking of difference works to feminize (and racialize) the region as well: "as 'woman' and 'region' share similar locations within dominant discourses, are each the 'marked' case, women become in effect regionalized and regions become in effect feminized" (37).[17] The feminized conception of the region is

[17] While focusing on gender difference as 'marked,' Fetterly and Pryse do also point to other differences in terms of race and class that characterize the region. However, their analysis of these categories is less developed: "regionalism marks that point where region becomes mobilized as a tool for critique of hierarchies based on gender as well as race, class, age, and economic resources. Here we would point to parallels between the process of creating

evident in Dunbar-Nelson's evocation of the Louisiana landscape in "By the Bayou St. John," which, like Lazarus's "The South," figures the region as a feminine personification.

In addition to the genre conventions of regionalism, Dunbar-Nelson taps into the immense popularity of feminized sentimentalism in nineteenth century US literature. Her stories about New Orleanian women who are unsuccessful in love (sometimes dying as a result) occasionally verge into representations a tragic feminine creole who is akin to the tragic mulatto figure common in African American writing from the period. This figure is deeply associated with sentimentalism and also the particular tragedy of the racial gendered politics of nineteenth century New Orleans, encapsulated by the system of *plaçage* and the "quadroon balls," which I will discuss in more detail in my reading of *Les Cenelles* and Afro-Creole short fiction.[18] Lauren Berlant defines sentimentalism as a feminized and feminizing genre that reveals the ways in which gender in itself constitutes an aesthetic genre and a text (or a literary figure) can be said to be gendered feminine:

> This is to say that, in the scene of this particular public, femininity is a genre with deep affinities to the genres associated with femininity. […] To call an identity like a sexual identity a genre is to think about it as something repeated, detailed, and stretched while retaining its intelligibility, its capacity to remain readable or audible across the field of all its variations. For femininity to be a genre *like* an aesthetic one means that it is a structure of conventional expectation that people rely on to provide certain kinds of affective intensities and assurances. (3-4)[19]

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regions and the ideological construction of 'separate spheres' for men and women. Both involve structures of dominance, draw boundaries of containment, prescribe and/or restrict political and economic power, construct cultural barriers, obstruct the perspective of persons who accept hierarchical structures that relegate certain persons to disenfranchised status, and require strategies of translation, conversion, and internalization from those so disenfranchised" (14).

[18] *Plaçage* was a social system in Antebellum New Orleans in which free women of color were "placed" as concubines or mistresses of white men, who they were often introduced to through "Quadroon Balls" which had the explicit purpose of making light-skinned free women of color sexually available to white men.

[19] The conceptual linkage between "gender" and "genre" is evident in the French term *genre*, which is the closest translation of "gender" in English but also encapsulates various other meanings along the lines of "type," including what is meant by the term "genre" when used in English. Berlant further defines sentimentalized conceptions of femininity as mediated through aesthetic genres: "Addressing femininity from the perspective of the mediated fantasies that magnetize many different kinds of women to the scene of suffering, sacrifice, survival, criticism, and sometimes sublimity that has historically provided the narrative of women's culture thus shows us something about

Following Berlant's argument, the literary and artistic production of feminized genres interpellates the audience into the performance of a particular feminized aesthetics as gender. While audience reception of the feminized creole is not the focus of my study, Berlant's argument enables an understanding of how language can convey gendered conventions and tropes, how a literary figure can be said to have a gender, and why her construction as a feminized figure has ideological relevance. At a moment of intense cultural anxieties over national identity, the creole's femininity enables her domestication (as genres of domesticity were deeply tied to sentimentality). While Lazarus and Dunbar-Nelson both resist the tropes of the domestic (as their creole figures are not married mothers), their figures raise questions about whether the exoticized region of Louisiana can be "domesticated" by the nation, suggesting perhaps a non-assimilability of this difference through a spectacularized and ungovernable femininity.

Dunbar-Nelson associates excessive and spectacularized femininity with creoleness as a quality of the geography of the Gulf Coast transmissible to and from its inhabitants with her evocation of "the eternal feminine." This story opens with a representation of the bayou as a feminine figure that blurs exoticizing associations of Egypt with the US South:

> The Bayou St. John slowly makes its dark-hued way through reeds and rushes, high banks and flat slopes, until it casts itself into the turbulent bosom of Lake Pontchartrain. It is dark, like the passionate women of Egypt; placid, like their broad brows; deep, silent, like their souls. Within its bosom are hidden romances and stories, such as were sung by minstrels of old.

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the operation of mass-mediated identity—that is, how it manages to sublimate singularity on behalf of maintaining proximity to a vague prospect of social belonging via the generic or conventional plot that isolates an identity as the desired relay from weakness to strength, aloneness to sociability, abandonment to recognition, and solitary agency to reciprocity" (11). Berlant's mention of constructions of femininity drawing women to "sublimity" alongside the sentimental and the tragic is particularly relevant to my argument about the feminine creole's performance of the spectacular in "The South" and through Dunbar-Nelson's evocation of the "Eternal Feminine." As I argue that the spectacular in these instances merges into the spectral, the aesthetics of the sublime also can enact a similar rupture or dissolution through sublimation (defined in chemistry as the direct transformation of solid material into vapor).

Notably, the bayou is not only ascribed feminine qualities in this description, but also mapped onto the form of a woman's body with a "turbulent bosom," "broad brows," and the racializing suggestion of skin complexion in the description of the bayou as "dark-hued." The suggestion of "hidden romances and stories" within the bayou further overlays writing and narrative production over the geography of Louisiana and feminine embodiment. The lovers in this story, Athanasia and the unnamed "Don," are portrayed as exotic themselves, associated with a mix of Spanish and French heritage and racialized as having a darker skin tone: "He was the final concentration of the essence of Spanish passion filtered into an American frame; she, a repressed Southern exotic, trying to fit itself into the niches of a modern civilisation. Truly, a fitting couple to seek the bayou banks." Dunbar-Nelson describes Athanasia in particular as a "Southern exotic" who while "repressed" does not manage to "fit" "into the niches of a modern civilization," and therefore is in excess of the restraint that would constitute being civilized, according to the nineteenth century connotations of this term. While it is implied that both characters are ethnically Spanish, Dunbar-Nelson's emphasis on the darkness of their eyes, "their eyes met with an exquisite shock of recognising understanding; dark eyes into dark eyes, Iberian fire into Iberian fire," suggests a proximity to whiteness that is not absolute and placed into question by the exoticism of their foreignness. The man is further implied to have Black heritage when he breaks off his relationship with Athanasia to travel to Italy or France, providing the rationale that opportunities are foreclosed to him within the United States: "It is only there, beneath those far Southern skies, that I could ever hope to attain to anything that the soul within me says I can. I have wasted so much time in the mere struggle for bread, while the powers of a higher calling have clamoured for recognition and expression." The references to those

clamouring for “recognition and expression” while he struggles financially are oblique, yet this seems to suggest the Jim Crow era politics of segregation and exclusion.

The plot of “By the Bayou St. John” remains obscure. Dunbar-Nelson insists on the failure of the central romance, but the precise logic of this failure is never made explicit. Readers are instead left with an accusation directed against “the eternal feminine” as a force of destruction that imbues the bayou landscape:

> Will you ever forget that day, Athanasia? How the little gamins, Creole throughout, came half shyly near the log, fishing, and exchanging furtive whispers and half-concealed glances at the silent couple. Their angling was rewarded only by a little black water-moccasin that wriggled and forked its venomous red tongue in an attempt to exercise its death-dealing prerogative. This Athanasia insisted must go back into its native black waters, and paid the price the boys asked that it might enjoy its freedom. The gamins laughed and chattered in their soft patois; the Don smiled tenderly upon Athanasia, and she durst not look at the reeds as she talked, lest their crescendo sadness yield a foreboding. Just then a wee girl appeared, clad in a multi-hued garment, evidently a sister to the small fishermen. Her keen black eyes set in a dusky face glanced sharply and suspiciously at the group as she clambered over the wet embankment, and it seemed the drizzling mist grew colder, the sobbing wind more pronounced in its prophetic wail. Athanasia rose suddenly. “Let us go,” she said; “the eternal feminine has spoiled it all.”

The presence of the water moccasin, a deadly snake native to that region of the United States, along with Dunbar-Nelson’s evocations of an “eternal feminine” guilt seems to reference the Catholic conception of sin tied to Eve’s fall from paradise after being tempted by Satan, who appears as a snake. Dunbar-Nelson situates the story of Eden firmly in the landscape of Louisiana through the local features of the feminized bayou and the water moccasin, tying this narrative to a specifically creole context. Rather than striking and killing Athanasia or her lover, however, this water moccasin seems to peacefully blend into the threatening landscape, manifesting only the “prophetic wail” of the wind and “crescendo sadness” of the reeds. The ambiguous emergence of the creole girl who is racialized through the description of her “black eyes” and “dusky face” seems connected to the ruin caused by the “eternal feminine.” Yet, her

actions do nothing to bring about this outcome. Rather, her emergence seems to act as a reminder of racialized creole femininity that perplexingly "has spoiled it all." In the context of this story, the spoiled totality could merely be Athanasia's romance, however, her lover had already planned to break things off for different reasons when the creole girl figuring the "eternal feminine" appears. Instead, this figure emerges as a ghostly presence absorbing the haunting perpetuation of racial violence which renders the entire regional landscape ambiguously destructive. The temporal scale of the "eternal feminine," that is more a quality imbued in the landscape of Louisiana than a property of any human, evokes a spectacularized presence of femininity as atemporal and in excess of the limitations of human lives. The remainder of the indelible legacy of racial violence seems to be the suppressed and unspeakable haunting transferred onto the creole figure of the "eternal feminine," encapsulating her as an ambiguous vestige of this legacy. As a figure of the Gulf Coast region in itself, the "eternal feminine" posits a feminine gendering as a resistant and queered undercurrent that marks the region as both spectacularized and spectral, resisting hegemonic classification, containment, and ultimately colonialization or incorporation into US nationalism. Dunbar-Nelson's figuring of the region as the "eternal feminine" thus builds on and revises earlier figurations of the New Orleans feminine creole by the writers of *Les Cenelles* to emphasize the particularity of New Orleans, an affiliation with France, and their resistance to cultural integration into the Anglophone US.

Constructions of the Creole Region in New Orleans Regionalism

While bearing similarities to other Francophone and Anglophone constructions of the creole, usage of the term "creole" also bears racial and ethnic nuances particular to the context of Louisiana. In the United States, the racially ambiguous significations of *creole* historically

clashed with the Anglo-American binary conception of race institutionalized to maintain rigid hierarchies that supported first slavery, and then racial segregation. The 1896 US Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* that famously upheld the constitutional legality of Jim Crow segregation laws also imposed a racializing ideology based on the "One Drop Rule" onto the construction of creole identities as the court violently re-defined plaintiff Homer Plessy, a biracial creole man from New Orleans, born into the antebellum class of free people of color, as Black, mandating his exclusion from "white" public spaces.[20] In spite of this Anglo-American ideological rigidity through the institutionalization of racism, socially, and especially within the regional context of Louisiana, definitions of "creole" remained in flux. Dunbar-Nelson's essays "People of Color in Louisiana," published in *Journal of Negro History* in 1917 and "A Creole Anomaly," published in *Leslie's Weekly* in 1897 define the nuanced racial and ethnic significations of *creole* that are ambiguous and contradictory, but ultimately situate the creole individual within a regimen of racialization and racial hierarchy. In "A Creole Anomaly," Dunbar-Nelson describes the formation of the racial category of the "Gigi (pronounced Gay-gay)," designating a light-skinned person with Black ancestry and falling under the broader scope of creole identities in late nineteenth-century Louisiana:

> They are neither white nor colored, when it comes to racial affiliation. In complexion they are likely to range from a blonde tint to deep olive, almost brown. […] The old French planters of a century ago who imported slaves from Africa are directly responsible for their being. The offspring of slave and master – a mixture of French white and African blood – took a higher position in serfdom than unmixed blacks. The complexion lightening process continued […] They generally kept black slaves themselves and formed a peculiar third element of society, even more marked than the

[20] The "One Drop Rule" was a legal and social policy specific to the construction of racial categories in the United States, used to perpetuate slavery and permit white planters to continue to enslave their own children born from rape of enslaved women. The ideology of the "One Drop Rule" was that any person with a single "drop" of Black blood (any identifiable genealogical descent from a person considered Black) was themselves Black, regardless of skin complexion or other aspects of their heritage. Prior to the Civil War, any person considered Black could be legally enslaved on the basis of race alone. After the abolition of slavery, this ideology was directly transferred into upholding the system of segregation.

> mulattoes of Hayti. During the war many fled to France and were lost in the Parisian whirl. The Gigi found himself placed in an awkward position. Racial affiliations demanded that he sympathize with the black element. Business interests and a wholesome love for the Southern blood in his veins threw his heart against the slave. Those who remained were, for the most part, neutral, and from these circumstances it is thought the term Gigi came to be applied, as in one form of Creole *patois* it means weak, vacillating, or untrue. (43)

Dunbar-Nelson's description of the *Gigi* as white-passing and economically aligned with the class of slaveholders due to the complex politics of colorism and identification as white providing a means of escape from slavery positions this creole figure as racially ambivalent with tendencies towards maintaining the violent system of racial classification due to their privileged status within this system. This definition also points to the sexual politics of miscegenation, the implication of the reproductive engendering of this identity by the "slave and master," which implies that the white master would necessarily be male and hints at the possibility of sexual violence against enslaved women as the origin story of the creole. While the Creole *patois* translation that Dunbar-Nelson provides, "weak, vacillating, or untrue," is imbued with stereotypes stemming from a resentment of the ways in which this group maintained and benefited from the structures of racism and slavery, the term "vacillating" in particular implies the mobility and mutability of racial categories.

Moving from the specificity of the "Gigi" to the broader scope of how people in Louisiana have been ascribed and claimed a Creole identity, Dunbar-Nelson provides a definition of "Creole" as a term that is inexact, highly contested, saturated with associations of racial oppression, and always racializing, whether the person in question identifies as Black, white, or another racial category. Dunbar-Nelson's definition of "Creole," also quoted in my introduction, demonstrates the ways in which this term is an unstable racial construct, in spite of white Creole's racist motivations for restricting this term's use:

> It is in the definition of the word Creole that another great difficulty arises. The native white Louisianian will tell you that a Creole is a white man, whose ancestors contain some French or Spanish blood in their veins, but he will be disputed by others, who will gravely tell you that Creoles are to be found only in the lower Delta lands of the state, that there are no Creoles north of New Orleans and will raise their hands in horror at the idea of being confused with the "Cajuns," the descendants of those Nova Scotians whom Longfellow immortalized in *Evangeline*. Sifting down the mass of conflicting definitions, it appears that to a Caucasian, a Creole is a native of the lower parishes of Louisiana in whose veins some traces of Spanish, West Indian or French blood runs. The Caucasian will shudder with horror at the idea of including a person of color in the definition, and the person of color will retort with his definition that a Creole is a native of Louisiana, in whose blood runs mixed strains of everything un-American, with the African strain slightly apparent.

Historical and ethnographic studies of creole identity in Louisiana demonstrate the ideological implications of this term's shifting racial significations. According to Virginia Domínguez in *White by Definition*, creole identity became racialized as a result of the Civil War and abolition of slavery creating the need to apply the United States' binary conceptualization of race and fetishization of white racial purity: "In the context of increasing racial polarization maintenance of a racially undifferentiated social category became deeply problematic. Suspicions multiplied about the Creole's racial ancestry" (141). Domínguez further explains, "The social motivation to maintain a racially exclusionary definition of creole as conferring whiteness was only heightened by the passage of Jim Crow segregation laws post-Reconstruction, but in spite of this social push amongst white creoles, people of color continued to self-identify as creole" (146-148). While Domínguez's archival research suggests that the term creole was only applied to free people of color during the antebellum period whereas slaves were simply classified as "Black" (124-5), Gwendolyn Midlo Hall challenges this definition to argue that the creole has always been Black and at the center of American culture. Hall refers to Louisiana creole culture as "the most significant source of Africanization of the entire culture of the United States" (157). "In

eighteenth-century Louisiana," Hall continues, "the term *creole* referred to locally born people of at least partial African descent, slave and free, and was used to distinguish American-born slaves from African-born slaves when they were listed on slave inventories" (157). Like Domínguez, Hall points to a political motive based on nineteenth century racial ideologies behind white creoles efforts to redefine the term "creole" to mean whiteness (158).[21]

For many of the creole characters in her stories, Dunbar-Nelson does not specify racial identity, which has led to some debate surrounding the political impetus of her representation of creole figures. In her "Introduction" to *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, Gloria Akasha Hull credits her writing with innovating the Black short story for American readers, while also arguing that Dunbar-Nelson's conservative portrayals of race and gender limited the political impact of her writing:

> Dunbar-Nelson, in her way, helped to create a black short-story tradition for a reading public conditioned to expect only plantation and minstrel stereotypes. Her strategy for escaping these odious expectations was to eschew black characters and culture and to write, instead, charming, aracial, Creole sketches that solidified her in the then-popular, "female-suitable" local color mode. (xxxii)

Various scholars have taken on Hull's contention that Dunbar-Nelson wrote "aracial" creole characters, offering interpretations that variously affix Dunbar-Nelson to a critique of whiteness and deconstruction of racial identity.[22] Taking a different interpretation from Hall of Dunbar-

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[21] Daryl Barthé provides nuance to this view of white Creoles, arguing that while upholding white supremacist ideologies, they themselves were not fully admitted into the privileging sphere of Anglo-American whiteness: "Though they were white, white Creoles still lacked the structural power to control the way they were perceived by the Anglo-American majority, and the Anglo-American majority perceived them as foreign curiosities and the products of French race-mixing" (43-44). For more discussion of the racialization of white Creoles, see my discussion of the definitions of *creole* in the Introduction and Chapter 3 on Jean Rhys's writing from a white Creole perspective.

[22] For example, Anna Storm argues that the whiteness of Dunbar-Nelson's characters allows her to perform a critique of white cultural dominance: "I argue that Dunbar- Nelson uses the genres of local- color fiction and the white- life novel to illuminate the limitations of progress narratives as well as traditional gender and sexual conventions. In her fiction featuring white characters, she sheds light on the failures and hypocrisy of dominant white bourgeois society, especially the heteronormative, patriarchal family structure. (Storm 364). Caroline Gebhard, on the other hand, challenges the assumption of whiteness when racial identifiers are absent and offers a

Nelson's representations of race, I am instead interested in the ways in which Dunbar-Nelson's characters' creole identity already implicitly racializes through this term's associations of (il)legible Blackness. In not directly identifying her characters as either white or Black, Dunbar-Nelson is perhaps implying a Louisiana creole notion of racial and ethnic identity that resists a binary classificatory system and allows for ambiguity. An early modernist fungibility of racial and ethnic identity in Dunbar-Nelson's writing coincides with an innovative blended form of prose and lyric poetry. As Hull credits her with the innovation of the Black short story, the compilation of *Violets and Other Tales* (1895) exceeds this generic formulation. Mixed with very brief works of short fiction are digressional essays on French literature and lyric poems. In the preface to *Violets*, Sylvanie Williams, an educator from New Orleans characterizes Dunbar-Nelson's writings as "fugitive pieces." This description seems aligned with the tradition of *marronnage* in Caribbean literature, which takes as a resistant cultural figure the marooned slave. In addition to invoking a resistant escape from slavery, the term "fugitive" emphasizes a brief, fleeting, and ephemeral element in the writing, associating it with the fragility of the violet figured in Dunbar-Nelson's title. I will return to a discussion of the symbolic meanings Dunbar-Nelson associates with the violet with a queer reading of her titular story from this volume.

While much of the scholarship on Dunbar-Nelson reads her within an Anglo-African American tradition, as she wrote in English, I aim to contextualize her representation of creole feminine figures and the broader construction of the New Orleans creole with the poetry and short fiction of francophone Afro-Creole writers during the nineteenth century, which constitutes

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reading of Blackness in Dunbar-Nelson's descriptions: "As a black writer, Dunbar- Nelson invites readers into a world where the particulars such as skin color often point to blackness, but she consistently refuses to give readers the clear- cut racial labels that confirm their complacent assumptions about black and Creole identity— or about authorial prerogatives. By staking her claim as a black writer to write about Creoles, a favorite subject of white New Orleans writers, she also necessarily exposes the presumption of whiteness as the universal perspective by claiming for herself the universal standpoint of the author" (Gebhard 338).

an alternative non-Anglo formulation of African American literature. Catherine Brosman argues convincingly that francophone literature from Louisiana should be read within the French national and colonial literary traditions:

> Might Francophone nineteenth-century Louisiana literature thus be just a "colonial branch" of French literature? For decades it could be viewed thus— perhaps also as a "hyperliterature" or "hypernational," by its devotion to traditions; the enduring presence of French Romanticism, even as it waned, on the Louisiana literary scene constituted a romantisme attardé, a kind of colonial postscript. (23)

While I am not contesting Brosman's argument about the "Frenchness" of this literature, I also view it as distinct from other francophone literatures from sites in the Americas such as Martinique and Guadeloupe, Haiti, or Québec due to the particularities of Louisiana's vexed integration as a US state at the time this literature was produced.[23] By writing in French and instantiating themselves within a French tradition, Louisianan Afro-Creole writers were thus also writing against an Anglo-American nationalism that demanded Louisiana's assimilation into the union. These writers published in the collaborative compilation *Les Cenelles* (1845) as well as news and literary periodicals were exclusively male and belonged to the class of free people of color. Many of them had transnational ties to France, having traveled to and been educated in Paris.

In the introduction to *Les Cenelles*, Armand Lanusse situates his cohort within the French national literary tradition, declaring the famed Black French writer, Alexandre Dumas, and Victor Hugo, known for his sympathy for revolutionaries and the working class, as the group's literary antecedents. While positioning the educated Louisianan man of color as an eloquent contributor to the French poetic tradition and a French subject, elegizing Napoleon in a display

[23] Louisiana first became part of the United States as a territory with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. It was then granted statehood in 1812.

of fervent patriotism, this volume implies a conditional call for recognition of citizenship and subjectivity of people of color that notably does not make any abolitionist appeals or claims to extend the same humanizing subjectivity to enslaved Black people in Louisiana.[24] Nevertheless,

[24] The seemingly apolitical Romanticism of the poems in *Les Cenelles* has resulted in a mixed legacy and uncertainty about their national identification with France or the United States. Henry Louis Gates Jr. points to the problem of reading the political implications of these poems as part of the African American literary tradition, while acknowledging *Les Cenelles* as the first literary anthology published by Black writers in the United States: "Lanusse's introduction is a defense of poetry as an enterprise for black people, in their larger efforts to defend the race against 'the spiteful and calumnious arrows shot at us,' at a target defined as the collective black intellect. Despite this stated political intention, these poems imitate the styles and themes of the French Romantics, and never engage directly the social and political experiences of black Creoles in New Orleans in the 1840s. *Les Cenelles* argues for a political effect – that is, the end of racism – by publishing apolitical poems, poems which share as silent second texts the poetry written by Frenchmen three thousand miles away" (25). Gate's problematization of *Les Cenelles* points to the irreconcilable position of free Creoles of color in a slaveholding society where to claim a racialized class position distinct from enslaved Africans performs a maintenance of the logic of slavery. Other scholars have questioned the efficacy of reading these poems through an African Americanist framework rather than a Transatlantic one due to the poems' continued superimposition of New Orleans and Paris. Thomas Haddox argues that the indifference of these poems to the genre conventions of nineteenth-century African American literature is precisely what makes their politics unsatisfying: "Gates's contention, however, relies on an implicit definition of nineteenth-century African American literature that regards the experience of slavery as central. Such a definition emphasizes certain genres (the slave narrative, the spiritual, the folktale, the abolitionist lyric poem) and certain recurring figures (the heroic slave, the tragic mulatta, the orator, the trickster), while identifying the tradition's authors and reading public with slaves, former slaves, and people with unambiguous abolitionist sentiments. *Les Cenelles*, however, corresponds to none of these categories. The poets' use of French romantic models conflicts with the emphasis on the African American vernacular that is the corollary of this definition (so that the poets' preference for standard French over Creole French or African American English presents a potential problem), while their subject matter often seems indifferent or hostile to political activism" (758). Lloyd Pratt argues for a reading of simultaneous countercurrents of identification, rejecting both an Americanist and transatlantic reading of *Les Cenelles*: "It is by now a standard gesture to suggest that the recent turn in literary and cultural studies away from the nation and toward new and different scales of affiliation presents a unique opportunity to address in a more satisfactory way such long-standing issues as the politics of *Les Cenelles*. Over the last fifteen years, we have been introduced (or reintroduced) to (among others) the transatlantic, the circumatlantic, the black Atlantic, the trans-American, the hemispheric, the global, the planetary, the oceanic, and the global American South. Although there has been salutary work done in each of these different scales of analysis, the increasingly plangent dream of a perfect scale evidenced by their proliferation can have two occlusive effects. On the one hand, the spatial turn as enacted in the context of U.S.- based literary and cultural studies has often advocated a false choice: between the region and the nation, the nation and the transnational, the local and the global, the hemisphere and the oceanic basin, or some other propositional binary. As postcolonial critics, critical geographers, and more sensitive Americanists and African Americanists have recognized, this logic of the either-or choice ignores how one is always simultaneously embedded in many different and asymmetric scales of belonging, each one of which requires political attention and the sum of which constitutes a given historical subjectivity" (Pratt *Lyric* 257). While Pratt offers a critique of the scholarly tendency to add new categories and scales of analysis that reinforce false binaries, I believe contextualizing creole figures and creolization in transatlantic exchange is necessary and does not negate a localized understanding. In this chapter, my focus is on the specificity of "creole" in the context of late nineteenth-century New Orleans, in both francophone and anglophone writing. In reading the French language writing of creole of color poets, I would like to resist imposing generic conventions of both French Romanticism and Anglophone African American literature. The position of creoles of color as a separate racial class that was not enslaved was materially different from that of nineteenth-century African American writers of slave narratives. In reading the poems of *Les Cenelles*, I recognize the ambivalent positioning ofa group of elite educated poets in Louisiana who were not themselves enslaved and may have directly or indirectly supported the maintenance of slavery.

scholars including Caryn Cossé Bell have read the antebellum Afro-Creole writers as part of a Black radical protest tradition through their identification with French republican values and appeals to subjectivity under the French revolutionary concept of *fraternité*:

> Both the positive and the critical accounts of French-speaking leaders as reactionary elitists have often ignored records in French and over-looked crucial aspects of free black protest. During the [Civil War], Afro-Creole spokesmen seized upon the ideals of the American and French Revolutions and images of revolutionary events in the French Caribbean. In literary works, newspaper editorials, and spiritualist séances, they recalled the unfulfilled promise of the age of democratic revolution. They demanded *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. The nature of their radical philosophy is a long-neglected aspect of the city's political history. (6)[25]

The concept of a Black New Orleanian *fraternité* is an explicitly masculinist construction of a brotherhood, very much in the gendered sense of the term, as not a single women-identified contributor is named in these nineteenth-century literary publications (although the writer Adolphe Duhart did publish under the female pseudonyms Lélia and Berthe).[26] Duhart's short story "Simple histoire" ("Simple Story") published in *La Tribune de la Nouvelle Orléans* in 1965 figures the Haitian Revolution through the sexuality and reproduction of a biracial feminine creole figure. "Simple histoire" tells an all but simple story of a white creole women, Mlle de Sauillac, who is the daughter of slaveholders and has an affair with the son of her Black nanny, whom she was raised to see as a brother, "ils s'étaient toujours donné le doux nom de frère et de soeur" / "they had always given themselves the sweet labels of brother and sister" (82), thus

[25] While the focus of my reading of *Les Cenelles* and antebellum Afro-Creole short fiction is on constructions of femininity, it is important to note that some of the writings from this group were politically engaged and more explicitly appealing to French nationalist ideology. Notably, the poem *La Marseillaise Noire* by Camille Naudin published in *La Tribune de la Nouvelle Orléans* in 1867 adapts the French national anthem *La Marseillaise* (which stems from the French Revolution of 1789) to call for an inclusion of Black men in the French republican ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

[26] Audrey Gibson speculates that the name Lélia came from Duhart's sister Marie-Lélia Duhart who records indicate died at age 5, and that Berthe was the name of Duhart's daughter or niece who also died in childhood (12-13). These personal references to feminine death and loss also make the feminine creole a spectral figure in Duhart's poetry who is presented to speak his verse from beyond the grave. Duhart was not one of the contributors to *Les Cenelles*, but published poetry and short fiction in the New Orleans press during the Civil War era.

invoking the ideology of *fraternité* in an appeal for racial equality. The “plus forte passion” / “most extreme passion” that Mlle de Sauillac feels for her enslaved lover results in her pregnancy. While her slaveholder parents hide the origins of her child, Mlle de Sauillac attempts to maintain maternal ties to her daughter under the guise of keeping her as a slave while also raising her. The story ends with the biracial creole daughter, Clémence, herself married with children, “desquels est sorti le premier martyr qui succombât à la cause de la liberté et de l’indépendance haïtienne” / “from which arrived the first martyr to succumb to the cause of Haitian liberty and independence” (85). In beginning with interracial sexuality figured through the body of the creole woman, this ironically named “Simple histoire” then results in a matrilineal line of descent traced to the martyr of the Haitian Revolution, glorifying a revolutionary abolitionist ideology through the figure of the creole mother and destabilizing racial hierarchies through female sexuality. Rather than Toussaint Louverture or the figure of the male revolutionary, it is the racialized and sexualized body of the creole woman that enacts Haitian independence. While the Haitian Revolution might seem a separate context from nineteenth-century New Orleans, many of the Afro-Creole writers in this group had family ties to Saint-Domingue, and the importance of the Haitian Revolution as the only successful overthrow of a slave regime in the Atlantic world to establish a free Black republic may have obliquely provided an ideological model for a revolutionary future that these writers envisioned for Louisiana. [27] Although they could not directly call for slave rebellion, perhaps not even abolition,

[27] Representations of Haiti and other ties to the Caribbean might seem to exist outside of New Orleans regionalism, but for this group of francophone Afro-Creole writers, these Caribbean regional ties were essential to the construction of New Orleans and superseded its relationality to the Anglo US. Some of these writers in fact had personal ties to Haiti, as Emily Clark explains that “The collection’s [*Les Cenelles*’] most prominent contributors were all of Haitian descent, including Lanusse and his brother, Numa Lanusse, Camille Thierry, and Victor Séjour” (157). Audrey Gibson’s archival research on Duhart documents that his family had Haitian heritage as well.

due to the tenuous position of free people of color in the antebellum US South, references to Haitian independence constituted an indirect mode of resistance.

While the poems in *Les Cenelles* do not engage in as overt of appeals to an abolitionist revision of French republican ideology as Duhart's "Simple histoire," they are nevertheless explicitly engaged in producing and revising constructions of Afro-Creole femininity, which pertains to French traditions of figuring ideological values and republican nationalism through the personification of a woman, Marianne.[28] *Les Cenelles*, given a somewhat obscure, regionally specific, title that means the fruit of the hawthorn or holly, is dedicated "Au beau sexe louisianais" (to the fair sex of Louisiana), presenting a series of romantic poems that often praise the chastity and virginity of their feminine subjects, or simply call out to a nondescript "muse vierge" (virgin muse).[29] Jarrod Hayes further defines the title "*Les Cenelles*" in terms of gender and sexuality, referencing a tradition of creole men giving the plant to women to demonstrate romantic interest:[30]

> In these verses, cenelle becomes a synonym for poem itself, and if one insists on the coloring of cenelles or mayhaws, haws, or hawberries, the writing of love and desire into poetry as gift to a beloved proceeds as the introduction of color into a territory otherwise as white as an empty page, the introduction of traces of rumor and open secret as invitations to read and interpret, as vehicles for choosing, perhaps desiring in territories otherwise defined by the absence of all of this, given the wider context of racial politics in the Anglo South of this period.

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[28] Marianne, the French iteration of Lady Liberty, originated from the French Revolution and has also become a national symbol of the French Republic. The Statue of Liberty, a gift to the United States from France demonstrates the link between the two feminine figures of the nation. This feminine figure can also be cast as Columbia, a personification of the US nation or the Americas (depending on the context).

[29] "Épître" (Epistle) by B. Valcour, 1838, line 7.

[30] Pratt provides a more detailed history of this practice: "The main title of the collection, Les Cenelles, directly cites the indigenous flora of the bayous, river bottom, and swampland that circled and threaded through antebellum New Orleans. Although "Les Cenelles" has sometimes been translated as "The Holly Berries," it in fact refers to the mayhaw plant. As the historian Jerah Johnson explains, mayhaws played a central role in the heterosexual courting rituals of New Orleans's free Creoles of color. Creole men of color ventured out in mayhaw-berry-gathering parties, and parties of Creole women of color then invited those men to join them in their kitchens as they turned mayhaw berries into mayhaw preserves." (*Strangers* 72)

Collectively, the romantic poems in *Les Cenelles* construct a feminine creole subject that is ambiguously racialized but set apart as an idealized virgin muse, both sexually available and remote.[31] These constructions of the idealized chaste feminine creole served to counter racist discourses on the sexual promiscuity of women of color exemplified by the system of *plaçage* in New Orleans that, as argued by Emily Clark, "forever excluded them from a claim to the ideal of chaste womanhood embodied by antebellum white women" (72). By emphasizing creole feminine virtue, the poets of *Les Cenelles* thus construct the creole feminine as a figure of racial uplift, albeit by capitulating to traditional ideals of feminine purity and domesticity.

The subtitle of *Les Cenelles*, "*Choix de Poésies Indigènes*" ("Selections of Indigenous Poetry") makes a claim to the specific belonging of Francophone creoles to the Americas. As Lloyd Pratt argues, this claim to indigeneity follows the rhetoric of white settler colonialism to absent the indigenous presence, while also making an appeal for recognition of Black creole identity:

> As I will suggest, that word, *indigènes*, highlights the difficulty of identifying this poetry as the product of a single national-cultural tradition, whether French, U.S., Haitian, or any other. To contemporary students of nineteenth-century African American anglophone

[31] While *Les Cenelles* feminizes the creole subject of desire, the poems also present a racial and ethnic definition of creole that occupies a specific racial position in antebellum Louisiana as neither white (in the case of the poets of color) nor enslaved. The existence of a social class of free creoles of color at this time would have provided a constant reminder of the realities of miscegenation in a slaveholding society and made the borders of racial caste less rigid. As Thomas Haddox explains, acknowledgement of a creole identity forced a more fluid understanding of race than a dichotomy between Black and white: "the existence of the *gens de couleur libres* was a consequence of miscegenation—a practice forbidden by the Louisiana Code Noir. Because of this prohibition, free Creoles of color had to emphasize both their visibility and their invisibility when defending their privileges. These privileges, after all, ultimately depended upon an admixture of white ancestry. To deny the white racial component would be to abolish the crucial distinction between free Creoles of color and other people of African descent, slave or free. Yet because their very persons drew attention to the forbidden mixing, the *gens de couleur libres* also undermined the notion of two monolithic races, suggesting that a plethora of different racial constructions could come into being."(Haddox 759). Jarrod Hayes adds to Haddox's assertion that the existence of free Creoles of color forces an unspoken acknowledgement of the construction of race and the permeability of racial boundaries in this context: "race as rumor or open secret circulates the same way in French Louisiana – not as hidden truths as in Anglo passing narratives, but as the very mechanism by which racialization is produced and reproduced as an ongoing process of choosing to or choosing to not address directly or act on the rumor as fact" (Hayes 66). While both Hayes and Haddox focus specifically on the "open secret" that race is a mutable construct, the implication of miscegenation in the production of Creole identities also suggests taboo sexuality.

writing, the word *indigènes* will seem anachronistic. The cultural nativism the word appears to signify does not significantly appeal to anglophone African Americans until the advent of the protomodernism of the late nineteenth century found in work by writers such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles Chesnutt. Importantly, this later taste for the "indigenous" departs from the notion of *indigène* signaled here. Here, the *Les Cenelles* poets use this word to contest the increasingly commonplace and nationalistic white anglophone American claim to indigenousness on behalf of white European settlers. Indebted to and often emerging from white Native American political parties, as well as from Know-Nothing thinking, claims for the indigenousness of European white people in America dominated many anglophone papers during this period. (Pratt, *Strangers* 70).

In *Creole Indigeneity*, Shona Jackson takes on a longer history of Caribbean creolization and créolité movements that valorize a Black creole identity through claims to indigeneity over white European colonizers. While the decolonial emphasis of these twentieth century Caribbean political movements is not present in *Les Cenelles* or much of nineteenth-century Francophone Louisianan writing, Jackson's analysis of the colonial logic underlying these claims still holds relevance: [32]

> As the product of the labor of the enslaved and indentured in the Caribbean, the postcolonial state is perceived as an ethnic inheritance for Creoles, not for Indigenous Peoples. Thus we are left with two senses of indigeneity: Creole ones that are associated with material accumulation, and those for Indigenous peoples […] that come to be associated with deprivation and underdevelopment. (4)

In labelling their poetry as "indigène/indigenous," the contributors to *Les Cenelles* make a claim to a uniquely American identity as well as asserting cultural legitimacy against the white Creole slaveholders, and yet this claim still participates in a white settler colonialist logic that supplants the prior claims of Native people. To appeal to the notion of American indigeneity in this context

[32] Jilian Sayre makes a similar argument to Jackson with regards to the ways in which genocide and the absenting of indigenous presence has allowed for the formulation of an American national identity: "The nation, and in particular the creole nativism that territorializes American identity, is born from an attachment that is also a foundational disavowal, one that forecloses the possibility of Indigenous presence and an Indigenous present. Insofar as the nation institutes and repeats this primary dislocation of Native subjects "outside temporality and presence" in the narratives of its origin, it creates a bind at the center of its liberal structures that requires the continued colonization of Indigenous peoples" (18). Sayre's conceptualization of creole nationalism here is drawn from Benedict Anderson's analysis of the formation of an American nationalist identity by white American-born creoles in *Imagined Communities*.

is to assert a proximity to whiteness. While the idea of a creole indigeneity does challenge the white planter colonialist ideology of possession of land and people (slaves), a creole of color claim to indigeneity still maintains the logic of the legitimacy of colonial possession that works through the dispossession of enslaved and Native people. Interestingly, by the twentieth century the Louisianan Creole was cast as a vanished figure no longer able to claim legitimate cultural and material possession, as Colman describes Creole people in his preface to *Creole Voices*: "Yet theirs is a vanishing group, for the process of physical and cultural amalgamation is going on relentlessly and at a rapid pace today. Soon, it is logical to suppose, the Creole as a separate and distinct group will have disappeared forever from our midst" (xxxviii). In returning to his depiction of the Creole as un- or anti-modern, Coleman suggests that this identity has been disappeared by the "cultural amalgamation" of modernity, much as the figure of the Native has also been disappeared in discourses of modernity, modernization, and creolization.

Pierre Dalcour's poem "Un an d'absence" (A year's absence) most directly represents the creole muse as an object of desire who is insistently both feminine and white (or white passing). The memory of her geographically connects New Orleans to Paris, bridging the Bayou and the Seine and figuring the creole geography of Louisiana through nostalgic longing for a feminine figure. This geographic overlay stages the continued relationality of New Orleans to the French metropole as opposed to the US nation, thus rejecting a US imperialism in favor of a French allegiance.[33] This poem is addressed to a blond-haired, blue-eyed creole woman (10, 25) who posits a link to an idealized European identity from which the poet has been exiled: "Toi seule as

[33] As I will discuss in Chapter Three, Jean Rhys stages a similar spatial superimposition of Dominica on the metropolitan spaces of London, Paris, and the French Riviera. Her representation, however, works to different discursive ends, illustrating the haunting of the metropole by its colonialism rather than identifying with the metropole to resist the imposition of an American nationalism.

su me plaire, / Ma Créole aux yeux bleus ; / Sur la rive étrangère" (9-11).[34] The creole woman's whiteness (indicated by her blue eyes) is thus aligned with her displacement to a "foreign" location and her uniqueness in being the one object of desire. The poem continues, indicating that this idyllic and desired foreign location is France and casting the return (presumably to New Orleans) as a return to the creole woman:

> La fortune cruelle
> M'exila de ces lieux,
> Mais je reviens fidèle,
> Brûlant des mêmes feux ;
> Au beau pays de France
> Je pleurais mes amours :
> Après un an d'absence
> Oui, je t'aime toujours ! (17-24)[35]

While fervently praising France, desire for the creole woman, who stands in for New Orleans, compels the speaker's return. Dalcour thus figures a regionalist identification through expressions of fidelity and declarations of love to the creole muse. He figures the feminine creole as even surpassing the "beau pays de France" ("beautiful country of France") as the object of his desire and thus instantiating her as a representation of New Orleans that remains accessible, evoked through memory, from within the metropole and a site to which the metropolitan subject may return to re-occupy.

In keeping with Lazarus' portrayal of the languishing potentially racialized creole woman of the South, further portrayals of women as objects of desire in *Les Cenelles* sets them apart as objects to extoll, while also emphasizing their ambiguous racialization. Rather than eroticizing the decadent sexuality of the creole muse as Lazarus does, these poems instead spectacularize

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[34] "Only you knew how to please me, / My blue-eyed Creole, / On that foreign bank." The term "rive," meaning bank, has a particular association with the geography of Paris in relation to the Seine, evoking the geographic division of the city into the "Rive droit/Rive gauche" (Right Bank/Left Bank).
[35] "Cruel fortune / Exiled me from these places, / But I return faithful, / Burning with the same fire; / In the beautiful country of France / I wept my feelings of love: / After a year's absence / Yes, I love you still!"

her sexual purity. The poem "À Ida" (To Ida) by M.F. Liotau describes a woman who could have Black heritage, marked by her black eyes and hair (3, 5), while praising her extreme youth and virginity, calling her "vierge pure" / "pure virgin" (19):

> Ce qui me plait en toi, ce que j'admire et aime,
> Ce ne sont pas, Ida, tes seize ans, ta fraîcheur.
> Ce n'est pas ton œil noir qui d'un amour extrême
> A su remplir mon cœur.
>
> Ce ne sont plus tes longs cheveux d'ébène,
> Ni même ton corps souple aux gracieux contours ;
> Ni tes pieds si mignons, ni ton maintien de reine
> Ni tes riches atours.
>
> Mais c'est cette vertu qui s'oppose sans crainte
> Aux volontés d'un cœur impudique et vénal,
> Cette douce candeur, cette innocence empreinte
> Sur ton front virginal. (1-12)
>
> What pleases me about you, what I admire and love,
> Is not, Ida, your sixteen years, your freshness.
> It is not your black gaze that, with an extreme love,
> Knew how to fill my heart.
>
> It is neither your long ebony hair,
> Nor your supple and gracefully contoured body ;
> Neither your adorable feet nor your queenly comportment
> Nor the riches around you.
>
> It is instead that fearless virtue that combats
> The liberties taken by an indecent and venal heart,
> That sweet naïveté, that innocence imprinted
> On your virginal brow.

The almost excessive repetition of Ida's virginity, innocence, and purity, not to mention that she is only sixteen years old juxtaposes her to the figure of the quadroon woman, cast as adjacent to the sex worker in her role as a mistress to elite white men. And yet there is a sinister element to this narrative of seduction, the counter-narrative of constant assault that must be combated

against: that Ida's purity is known because she must constantly oppose "an indecent and venal heart," that at age sixteen, Ida's consent remains negligible as she is constructed as available to seduction and temptation away from her virginity. This same narrative of seduction is apparent in the poem "Parle toujours" (Always Talk) by Camille Thierry, which declares adoration for a "vierge enfantine" (a childlike virgin) (1) and "Ange aux yeux noirs, ange créole" (black-eyed angel, creole angel) (14). This vison of the creole as racialized but insistently conforming to ideals of feminine purity again posits her as a figure of projection of constraint and excess, while at the same time in being virginal to an extreme, hinting at an anxiety over the potential expression of her sexuality. In continuously extolling the creole woman's fairness and virtue, the poets of *Les Cenelles* thus elevate the racialized creole (and thus the "quadroon" without naming this racial category) to the status of ideal femininity, appealing to gendered ideologies in their call for inclusion in the supposedly egalitarian republicanism.

While the poetry in *Les Cenelles* idealizes the virginal creole, the Afro-Creole short fiction by Lanusse and others published in the New Orleans periodicals constructs the creole/quadroon as a tragic figure to critique the racial, gendered, and class structures that left women of color vulnerable to sexual exploitation by elite white men and too often resulted in their impoverishment. Like the figure of tragic mulatta in African American literature, who presents a similar narrative trope of a light-skinned biracial woman subjected to sexual violence and death due to her racial status, Lanusse and other antebellum Afro-Creole writers revise this figure situate her within the particular social circumstances of free women of color in New Orleans. In the particular situation of (post)colonial antebellum New Orleans, where the quadroon was a free woman of color, she was compelled into sex-work adjacent positions through "quadroon balls" and *plaçage*, thus framing the racialized creole woman as always

verging on the figure of prostitute.[36] According to Clark, this construction of the quadroon occurred through the projection of white male desires:

> [The] New Orleans quadroon could be tamed and mastered to serve American interests. Once in America, the figure shed her manipulative agency and assumed a position subordinated to white male interests. Her seduction by white men symbolically emasculated black men. The quadroon was an antidote to the contagion of slave rebellion borne on the currents of masculine violence that Americans so feared. (132-3)[37]

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[36] Floyd Cheung argues that for creole men of color, the institution of *plaçage* posed a threat against notions of masculinity that necessitated a recovery of the creole man of color as an honorable suitor in *Les Cenelles*. Cheung argues that "In fact, we can read *Les Cenelles* as a reaction to quadroon balls; if we do so, these poems transcend classification as mere imitations of French Romantic poetry and can be read as indirect, discrete attacks on an insidious threat to the manhood and cultural integrity of free blacks" (6). Cheung extends this argument to view the heterosexual pursuit of creole women by creole men as a mode of resistance to white supremacy, claiming that "[free men of color] rose up to compete for the attention of free women of color and, by implication, contested white dominance. Thus *Les Cenelles* functions as a declaration of thoughts entertained yet previously unspoken, of resistance dreamed by not executed until 1845" (9). Thadious Davis presents an important qualification of a critique of *plaçage* by acknowledging the degradation of sex workers that often accompanies moralistic accusations of the harm caused by *plaçage* and other sexual contracts that were outside the bounds of normative marriage: "Most often in scholarship today, the *placée*, the woman in the *plaçage* relationship, is represented as a victim of a sexual bartering resembling the selling of women slaves at public auction. While this comparison is viable to an extent, it renders an observation from the outside, from the largely white, and reformist, perspective that exposes the evils of slavery and its aftermath in terms of the violence done to women's bodies and to family structure. However, as is often the case, "victimhood" does not fully explain the economic motive from the perspective of women of color who, suffering from the very economic restrictions placed on blacks and on women that prevented them from undertaking a range of work options that would be deemed "respectable," find a way to sustain themselves and their families, and to do so within the highly acceptable "accumulation of wealth" that marked the rise of prosperity in the new capitalist regime emerging alongside the slave-based economy. The moralist view condemns the practice and aligns it with prostitution without observing that the structures it imposed on its very practices created a quasilegal overlay and an approximation of marriage sanctions. At stake is property and the clear uncontested accumulation of property and inheritance of property." (Davis 213-14). While the degree of autonomy Creole women found in the institution of *plaçage* likely varied, evocations of this practice in literature from Louisiana including the poetry in *Les Cenelles* indicate the ways in which a racialized creole womanhood is constituted through the cultivation, commodification and exchange of femininity and feminine sexuality for the material security that Davis emphasizes.

[37] Although a regionalist figure emerging from the particular racial class system of New Orleans, Clark argues that the quadroon was actually central to a national US cultural ideology while her presence was discursively repressed. Taking the example of Sally Hemmings, Clark locates this figure at the nexus of clashes between nationalist ideology and the contradictions of slavery: "At the end of the eighteenth century, Americans imagined the beautiful, seductive quadroon as a foreigner in the Caribbean who did not occupy American territory. In fact, of course, the quadroon was already well established in the bosom of the young republic under circumstances such as those at Monticello. This homegrown American quadroon was unacknowledged, however, both literally and figuratively. She, like Sally Hemings, remained in the shadows for nearly two centuries while Americans developed a complex symbolic strategy that kept her at an imaginative distance from the nation's heart and heartland. When the Haitian Revolution drove thousands of mixed-race women from the Caribbean to American shores, the figure of the quadroon supplied something more accessible than algebraic abstraction to neutralize the threat embedded in mixed-race people. The foreign female of color who migrated to the United States from the blood-soaked shores of Haiti could be mastered and controlled by white American men. This fantasy of sexual triumph supplied an antidote to the terror inspired by the image of Haiti's virile black men poised to export their war on slavery to the American mainland." (6)

While the quadroon distinct from the creole in specifying a racial identity based on genealogical fractions, the tragic quadroon merges into the tragic feminine creole through the sustained ambiguity over racial identity (as these feminine figures, even in the short fiction clearly referencing *plaçage* are never labelled “quadroon” or otherwise explicitly racially identified).

In contrast to the abstraction of the idealized whitened feminine creole in *Les Cenelles*, Armand Lanusse’s short story “Un Marriage de Confiance” (1943) presents an alternative feminine creole tragic through a sentimentalist representation of the system of *plaçage* and the intersecting hierarchies of race and gender that rendered a woman of color uniquely vulnerable to sexual exploitation in antebellum New Orleans. “Un Marriage de confiance” begins with a frame narrative of an unnamed, presumably male narrator who visits a Cathedral in New Orleans, encounters a woman in distress (also unnamed) fervently praying to Mary who recounts her story. This story begins with the interruption of the woman going to live with her mother (a figure of negligence who leads her to temptation, presenting a negative maternity in contrast to Mary):

> Il y avait un an que j’habitais la maison de ma mère et je ne pouvais me faire encore au langage futile de mes sœurs aînées qui ne s’occupaient que de bals, de festins, de parures. Elles étaient de toutes les fêtes et voulaient toujours que je les y accompagnasse ; mais je résistais à toutes les tentations qui m’étaient offertes jusqu’alors, quand, vers la fin du carnaval dernier, ma mère, à qui mon obstination, disait-elle, déplaisait, exigea de moi que je parusse dans un monde qui m’était tout à fait nouveau. (76)

> I had lived at my mother’s house for a year, and I couldn’t yet acclimate myself to the futile talk of my older sisters who thought of nothing but balls, celebrations, and finery. They were at all the parties and always wanted me to accompany them; but I had resisted all the temptations offered to me up until the moment when, towards the end of last year’s Carnival, my mother, who my stubbornness displeased, she said, insisted that I go out into a world which was entirely new to me.

While the characters' race is never specified, the setting of these balls, where the woman is subsequently seduced by a white man marked with higher social status, implies that these are "quadroon balls," and therefore that Lanusse's female protagonist is racialized as a free person of color, having light skin but Black heritage that socially marks her as an eligible mistress for a rich white man but not a candidate for marriage. This is subsequently implied when the male seductor, Gustave (the only named character) proposes a "marriage de conscience" which the protagonist's mother pressures her into accepting. This situation is cast as the only option due to her social status: "ce jeune homme, occupant dans la société un rang plus élevé que le nôtre, ne pouvait s'unir légitimement à moi […] ce n'était donc que comme une maîtresse et non comme une épouse que Gustave me recherchait" / "that young man, occupying a higher rank in society than ours, could not enter into a legitimate union with me […] it was therefore only as a mistress and not a wife that Gustave sought me" (77). While Lanusse never specifies his protagonists' social status, in this context, readers likely would have assumed her to be a free woman of color. The narrative of the protagonist's initiation into the ball has a fairytale quality, comparable to Cinderella, who then encounters her prince, foregrounding Lanusse's narrative trajectory of seduction. Lanusse's emphasis on the novelty and social initiation of the protagonist as she crosses the threshold into the society of the balls, an entry into "un monde qui m'était tout à fait nouveau," positions this story as a failed fairytale or bildungsroman in which the protagonist is instead initiated into the tragic plot of seduction. The coinciding of this initiation with Carnival heightens the suggestion of liminality and transgression, as the Carnival masquerade enables the assumption of new identities and temporary subversion or suspension of social roles, in addition to imparting regionalist associations with New Orleans.

This initiation into the spectacle and novelty of the Carnival ball precipitates the tragic feminine creole narrative. The protagonist is persuaded to accept Gustave's proposed arrangement because the presence of a priest "donne tout le caractère d'un engagement légitime" / "gives everything the character of a legitimate engagement" (78), so she does not understand that this is not in fact a legally sanctioned marriage. She becomes pregnant and Gustave begins to see other women, and entering into a legitimate engagement with one who is presumably part of the white elite. When the protagonist confronts him about this, he tells her that their vows were meaningless because it was only a "marriage de conscience." Their child dies and Gustave abandons her, leading her to seek refuge at the cathedral. The emphatic connection of the "tragic quadroon" / tragic creole to New Orleans stems from the allure of Carnival. Carnival thus doubles for the "quadroon ball" in this story, presenting a regionally inflected source of disruption, destruction and death. While the creole woman does not die in this version, she does in other iterations such as the short story "Marie" (1843) published anonymously in the same volume of *L'Album littéraire* as "Un Marriage de Conscience." "Marie" ends with the tragic creole woman's suicide. In Lanusse's story, the death of the woman's child and her absolute vulnerability after her abandonment enacts a form of spiritual death which, which is positioned as the direct narrative consequence of her entry into the fantastical realm of Carnival.

Dunbar-Nelson's Queering of the Tragic Creole at the Carnival Ball

In taking Lanusse's "Un Marriage de Conscience" as an antecedent for the scene of death at a Carnival ball that occurs in Alice Dunbar-Nelson's "A Carnival Jangle," I re-situate Dunbar-Nelson's writing in relation to this tradition of the tragic quadroon and read the representation of the Carnival ball as a residual echo of the antebellum quadroon balls. Dunbar-Nelson however

queers this narrative by refiguring racial passing as gender transgression, as Flo's death at Carnival directly results from her cross-dressing. As late nineteenth century African American literature furnished a genre of passing narratives about light-skinned biracial characters, identification of a character as "creole" already suggests the possibility of passing, concealed heritage, and the hidden secret of miscegenation. Thomas Strychacz's reading of Dunbar-Nelson's depiction of racial identity is particularly helpful to my argument here in emphasizing the ambiguity and flexibility of racial designations in a way that can also be connected to gender fluidity:

> Writing within a regime where legal and social codes violently enforced discriminatory "readings" of race, Dunbar-Nelson in *The Goodness of St. Rocque* keeps alive a fiercely guarded openness of definition - partly through her representation of ambiguous Creole identities, but still more importantly through the way her stories invite readers to perform a continuing and always insecure negotiation with signifiers of race. (Strychacz 2)

Strychacz offers a queer reading of Dunbar-Nelson's story "A Carnival Jangle," first published in *Violets* and reprinted in *St. Rocque*, in which Flo (whose name suggests fluidity) is murdered after her identity is mistaken when she puts on a disguise of a troubadour for Carnival, leading people in the crowd to assume she is a man. Due to Flo's cross-dressing, Strychacz argues that "Flo may be gendered in multiple ways" (6), demonstrating "the possibility that a character's 'real' sex may be indistinguishable from her/his performances of gender" (6). While racial descriptors are not analogous to gender, it is worth noting that indications of Flo's potential whiteness go along with assertions of her potential femaleness, for example, both race and gender significations allow her to be mistaken for someone else: "It's Leon, see? I know those white hands like a woman's and that restless head" (82). Significantly here, the perception of Flo as both "white" and with "hands like a woman's" serves to obscure her identity rather than

attaching her to identity categories, a mistake that in leading to her death negates her as an individual.

Flo is again described as white in association with femaleness as the story ends with the image of "the dead, white face of the girl troubadour" (83). While this description more clearly classifies Flo as a "girl" (through her death), the qualification of "troubadour" maintains the suggestion of her male-presenting appearance. Strychacz reads the ending of "A Carnival Jangle" as de-gendering her in death only to re-ascribe the category of female as a costume or a mask:

> It is only fitting that, dead, Flo momentarily possesses a gender-less identity as a 'horrible something' before the last description of her as a girl. And it is only fitting that the last description of her emphasizes the fact that she is a girl troubadour – as if death has locked her into the one identity that seemed most dispensable, the one most obviously a mask (6)

The concept of the Carnival mask as destabilizing categories of race and gender recalls Paul Laurence Dunbar's famous poem, "We Wear the Mask," published in 1895, the same year that Dunbar-Nelson published *Violets*. While this was a couple years before their marriage in 1898, and Dunbar-Nelson wrote *Violets* before she had met Dunbar, he had an established reputation as a poet and Dunbar-Nelson would have likely had some familiarity with his work.[38] Dunbar's evocation of the mask clearly differs in that it allows for some agency of the wearer to craft their performance by serving as a strategy to defer some of the pressures and constraints of white supremacy, although the mask is not a voluntary choice or something the wearer would have the ability to remove:

> We wear the mask that grins and lies,
> It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
> This debt we pay to human guile;

[38] Tara Green establishes their correspondence by mail as beginning with Paul Laurence Dunbar's letter of introduction to Dunbar-Nelson (Alice Ruth Moore at the time) in April, 1895 after Dunbar took an interest in her writing (131).

With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Dunbar's mask suggests that the semblance of accommodating white supremacy with "grins and lies" provides Black Americans a means of resistance, yet this performance is also enforced as a "debt" that causes harm to the performers, "With torn and bleeding hearts." Flo's disguise in "A Carnival Jangle" may similarly make her interiority illegible. This disguise allows her a means of temporary escape from the constraints of femininity while also locking her in a state of gender indeterminacy that causes her death.

Like Lanusse's "Un Marriage de conscience," "A Carnival Jangle" begins with a narrative of fantasy and seduction situated in the unique space of a New Orleans Mardi Gras celebration. Dunbar-Nelson indicates that the space and time of Carnival is conducive to fantasy and excess, describing the scene as "A maddening dream of color and melody and fantasy gone wild in an effervescent bubble of beauty that shifts and changes and passes kaleidoscope-like before the bewildered eye." Flo is seduced into joining the confusion of this fantasy by a disguised stranger, the "Prince of Darkness": "But in the confusion a tall Prince of Darkness had whispered to one of the girls in the unmasked crowd: 'You'd better come with us, Flo, you're wasting time in that tame gang. Slip off, they'll never miss you; we'll get you a rig, and show you what life is.'" While the "Prince of Darkness," later referred to as Mephisto, seems evocative of the devil, his disguise that entirely obscures his identity and association with the concealment of the dark also suggests the seductive power of slipping out of categories of identity. Dunbar-Nelson aligns this experience with sexuality as well, implying Flo's desire for Mephisto and a potential sexual awakening as she was "being initiated into the mysteries of 'what life is.'" The practicalities of this initiation involve changing Flo's gender presentation as she is offered a male disguise by an old woman who is implied to be a voodoo practitioner: "'But the demoiselle

wishes to appear a boy, *un petit garcon?*' she inquired, gazing eagerly at Flo's long, slender frame." Flo's gender transformation here occurs through the French linguistic interjections of Dunbar-Nelson's creole regionalism. Flo's transformation from a "demoiselle" (a term of respect for a young woman) to "*un petit garcon*" (a little boy) indicates a complexity of gendering that does not necessarily rely on a concrete binary. Rather than becoming a man, Flo is becoming a boy, and thus sealed in a state of youth, assigned a gender that is not entirely equivalent to adult masculinity. The old woman's decision to turn Flo into "*un petit garcon*" seems a response to Flo's appearance, as Dunbar-Nelson emphasizes the old woman's gaze on "Flo's long, slender frame," as if there is already something about her appearance suggestive of masculinity or the detachable state of her femininity.

Flo and Mephisto form a queer coupling, encoding gender fluidity and the suggestion of homosexuality in the excesses of Carnival and death. After she puts on the troubadour disguise, Dunbar-Nelson shifts to a use of male pronouns for Flo to recast her and Mephisto as same-sex (male) lovers. Dunbar-Nelson uses the language of cause-and-effect here, stating, "And that was why you might have seen a Mephisto and a slender troubadour of lovely form, with mandolin flung across his shoulder," building to the suggestion that Flo's gender transgression is the eventual cause of her death. But rather than an entry into a fixed state of maleness, it is Flo's continued gender indeterminacy that facilitates her mistaken identity. The undecidability of Flo's gender is emphasized as one member of the anonymous group of murderers says to the others, "I'd know that other form anywhere. It's Leon, see? I know those white hands like a woman's and that restless head." In becoming Leon (the identity ascribed to her by the anonymous assailants), Flo retains feminine traits such as "white hands like a woman's," but these are made to re-signify a feminized maleness rather than situating her clearly in a single gender category.

The scene of her murder is then overlayed with sexual tones as the assailant speaks to his knife, "'Ah, sweetheart, you've waited long, but you shall feast now!' He was caressing something long, and lithe, and glittering beneath his blanket." This masturbatory imagery casts the knife as a phallus that violently penetrates Flo, associating her stabbing with sexual assault. In addition to the overtones of sexual violence, this act of stabbing forcibly fixes her gender identity in the misrecognition of her as Leon. Dunbar-Nelson describes the scene of the stabbing as a chaotic merging of bodies:

> In a masked dance it is easy to give a death-blow between the shoulders. Two crowds meet and laugh and shout and mingle almost inextricably, and if a shriek of pain should arise, it is not noticed in the din, and when they part, if one should stagger and fall bleeding to the ground, who can tell who has given the blow? There is naught but an unknown stiletto on the ground, the crowd has dispersed, and masks tell no tales anyway. There is murder, but by whom? for what? *Quien sabe*?

While the "inextricable" mingling of "two crowds" and the "shriek" echo sexual intimacy, the outcome of Flo's story that was initially suggested through her initiation "into the mysteries of 'what life is'" this public spectacle of the excessive and identity-less merging of the masses recasts sexuality as violation and intimacy that is destructive in its extremes, leading to the annihilation of the individual and death. Dunbar-Nelson's questioning in passive voice, "There is murder, but by whom? for what? *Quien sabe*?" emphasizes a loss of individuality and meaning along with the displaced grammatical subject. As Strychacz indicates, Flo is stripped of gender identity in death as the story concludes with the de-personalization of Flo's corpse brought to her mother: "a broken-hearted woman sat gazing wide-eyed and mute at a horrible something that lay across the bed." As the "horrible something," Flo exists in a state of forced fungibility where she is neither Leon, nor the troubadour, nor Flo and no longer given the language of personhood. In addition to being a story of gender transgression, "A Carnival Jangle" situates the violent ramifications of gender fluidity as a particular effect of creolization and Carnival. While this is

not tied to creole ethnicity per se, an effect of creolization occurs through the merging and hybridization of identities amidst the spectacle of Carnival. While the setting of Carnival is highly specific to New Orleans creole culture, Dunbar-Nelson also presents this celebration as a moment of incongruous and excessive combinations and transformations evoking the basic meaning of "creole" as generative cultural mixture, with gender indeterminacy at the forefront. Dunbar-Nelson thus implies that the creole is a queered figure of gender transgression, that the unsettling of gendered categories occurs alongside racial and ethnic fungibility.

It is here significant that the anonymous murderers in "A Carnival Jangle" are dressed as Carnival Indians. Dunbar-Nelson's evocation of creoleness in the setting of Mardi Gras through the simultaneous exposure and erasure of indigenous presence by presenting the anonymity afforded by these "red-face" disguises aligns with Shona Jackson's analysis of the representational position of Native people and with *Les Cenelles* construction of a creole identity as indigenous in (post)colonial New Orleans. The ominous role of the Mardi Gras Indians in "A Carnival Jangle" reflects how the maintenance of creoleness requires the negotiation of indigenous presence and erasure. This tension is also more broadly demonstrated in the performance tradition of Carnival Indians by non-Native Black and white people in the history of New Orleans' Mardi Gras spectacles[39]. Dunbar-Nelson describes the Carnival Indians as a

[39] In assessing the tradition of Black participants in Mardi Gras spectacles dressing as Carnival Indians, Roach describes the complicated dynamic of racialized performance that while potentially invoking harmful stereotypes is not a direct effort at the maintenance of white supremacy: "Those a generation away from slavery, exiles from a home they would never know, could identify with Native Americans, bitter exiles in their own land. The slave-holding propensities of the Five Civilized Tribes (so-called by whites in part *because* they held slaves) emphasize the double, inverted nature of the Indian as a symbol for African Americans: the nonwhite sign of both power and disinheritance. The theme of frontier space – and its control by nomads – illuminates, I think, the importance of border skirmishes and alarums enacted by Mardi Gras Indians. On Mardi Gras day Indian gangs claim the space through which they move, like a passing renegade band, and the broad arm's length gestures they make show off more than just their costumes. They occupy the constantly shifting borderlands, protected on their flanks by scouts (Spy Boys) as they migrate from block to block, from bar to bar. They perform a rite of territory repossessed to assert not sole ownership, perhaps, but certainly collective entitlement to fair use" (Roach 204).

source of spectacle, excess, and sublimation of individual identity (as this disguise grants a nameless anonymity, presents participants as a mass rather than individually, and allows for the assailants to murder Flo, bringing about the erasure of her identity). Dunbar-Nelson initially describes the scene of the Mardi Gras spectacle as “Fantasy and fancy and grotesqueness in the costuming and behavior of the maskers run wild. Such dances and whoops and leaps as these hideous Indians and devils do indulge in; such wild curvetings and great walks.” By aligning the Carnival Indians with devils, Dunbar-Nelson associates their performance with death and destruction. This description reinforces negative stereotypes of Native people as excessive, acting outside of the bounds of civilization through their “grotesqueness,” the implication that they’ve “run wild,” their stereotyped “dances and whoops and leaps” and indulgence in “wild curvetings and great walks” and the racially inflected pejorative description of them as “hideous.” While the racial identity of these people is unknown, their red-face performance is clearly inauthentic as Dunbar-Nelson refers to them as “mimic Red-men,” aligning them with the broader cultural history of black-face minstrelsy in American performance. Dunbar-Nelson’s indications of excessive movement, the “wild curvetings and great walks,” positions the Carnival Indians as figures of fluidity and mobility, who like Flo, demonstrate the porosity of identity categories and the impossibility of reflecting a fixed boundary of the self.

In his analysis of the performance of Carnival Indians (based on late 20th century ethnographic work) in *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach associates the aesthetics and traditions of this performance with the display and management of ritual excess. Building on Georges Bataille’s theory of sacrifice in *The Accursed Share*, Roach argues that the history of Euro-

American representation of indigeneity through association with ritual sacrifice allowed for the management and negotiation of whiteness:[40]

> What these representations accomplished, in my view, was the accommodation of exotic accounts of Atlantic superabundance and sacrifice into the normalizing regimes of whiteness. Cognizant of ritual practices, like the taking of captives in the Aztec Flower Wars (the object of which was not to achieve victory per se but to obtain victims for sacrifice), Europeans depicted Native Americans as cruel prodigals. As such, they performed as dual substitutes, doubling as sacred priests and sacred offerings, their bodies methodically clothed and unclothed. [...] They did so believing in the efficacy of a particular rite of symbolic kinship: different bloods could be mixed but only after a certain portion of them—the accursed share—had been spilled. (Roach 131)

While Dunbar-Nelson's "Carnival Jangle" does not feature a representation of ritual sacrifice, Flo's murder in the midst of the chaotic celebration could be interpreted along these lines. Flo is violently purged as the excess — the accursed share according to Bataille — amidst the spectacle of Carnival, an excess in itself. In Bataller's theory this excess is non-productive, and while its ritualistic purging enables the generation of a spectacularized extreme, this also allows for the

[40] In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille defines the accursed share as the portion of excess that cannot be channeled towards productive growth: "The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically" (21). Bataille's theory of excess as an energy that cannot be used or incorporated into a system of profit and thus must generate an extreme, whether "gloriously or catastrophically" situates excess as the uncontained and unaccounted for element of a society or economy. Bataille's theory of sacrifice is clearly racialized as he bases this definintion of the accursed share on an account of Aztec ritual sacrifice drawn from primitivist ethnographic writings: "The victim is a surplus taken from the mass of *useful* wealth. And he can only be withdrawn from it in order to be consumed profitlessly, and therefore utterly destroyed. Once chosen, he is the *accursed share*, destined for violent consumption. But the curse tears him away from the *order of things*; it gives him a recongnizable figure, which now radiates intimacy, anguish, and the profundity of living beings" (59).This conception of sacrifice as a performed "intimacy" in the "violent consumption" of the victim that situates this person as the object of excess works dialectically to restore the state of the sacrificer as well, for according to Bataille, What the ritual has the virtue of rediscovering is the intimate participation of the sacrificer and the victim, to which a servile use had put an end" (56). While the dialectic function of the sacrificed to restore a sort of order to the sacrificer implies a reliance of each position upon the other, Bataille's emphasis on intimacy indicates a symbolic reframing of the sacrificial imaginary as a functioning to construct an intimate space alongside an expunging of excess. Intimacy itself becomes an excess, for it is a product of the spectacularization of surplus, not disrupted by the fantasy of sacrifice, but created by it. While Bataille's theory suggests that there is a violence to the process of capitalistic consumption, and that a capitalist society will purge excess violently, the production of an endlessly expanded fantasy of the spectacular production and purging of excess allows for a lingering outside of the economic order in which excess is efficiently destroyed.

maintenance of the social order.[41] Roach furthermore connects the purging of excess through representations of death to the maintenance of normative hegemonic whiteness aligned with the fantasy of miscegenation's failure to result in reproduction. As Roach argues, "Sublimated in countless dramas and narratives that fantasize interracial liaisons, such associations tend to culminate in one form or non-consummation or another, often that of violent death" (133). While consummation and production of interracial children is often the imagined outcome of these narratives, Roach emphasizes the element of ritual sacrifice behind miscegenation narratives, which can be seen in the overrepresentation of the tragic mulatto in nineteenth-century American literature. "A Carnival Jangle" seemingly supplants racial categories with gender by avoiding racial labels (except for the racial disguise of the Carnival Indians) and instead representing illicit sexuality through the suggestion of Flo (as the male troubadour) and her suitor Mephisto as a queer coupling. Yet by resituating "A Carnival Jangle" in the context of Lanusse's doubling of Carnival and the quadroon ball with Carnival in "Un marriage de conscience," the Carnival ball emerges as a space potentially structured through Black femininity as the site of the tragic creole.

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[41] In his analysis of the performance of excess through violence and sacrifice in the Mardi Gras spectacle, Roach associates violent expenditure with the assertion of masculinity, drawing from the popularity of Wild West shows such as Buffalo Bill's: "Steeped in the violence of gunfire, [Buffalo Bill's Wild West] certainly enacted the theme of machismo in the face of a race war. Buffalo Bill also dramatized the despoilation of the West, the wanton slaughter of the buffalo, in a way that exemplifies my definition of violence as the performance of waste. That is one reason why the shift by Mardi Gras Indians from confrontation based on nerve and spears and guns to competition based on patience and sequins and hems is so very interesting. It is no accident that competitive stitchery, beadwork, and opulent adornment have edged out violence in the confrontation between rival gangs. At carnival everyone wants to be seen in acts of conspicuous consumption and expenditure. For the urban underclasses in the United States at the end of the twentieth century, violence is one of the few forms of excess expenditure available in the absence of money. People spend their own and one another's blood" (Roach 206). While the economic aspects of conspicuous expenditure are in keeping with Bataille's theory in which the accursed share is what cannot be subsumed into capitalist value, Roache's analysis of how the management of the desire for excess takes on a gendered dimension does not account for the associations between excessiveness and femininity, particularly in terms of the "opulent adornment" on display in the elaborately produced costumes. While Dunbar-Nelson similarly associates Flo's murder with the excessive masculinist violence of "rival gangs," an analysis of on masculinist excess alone misses the display of feminized excess in the sentimental narrative ending of Flo's mother weeping over her corpse. What this seems to suggest is that gender itself is in a state of excess that requires violent expenditure in this narrative through Flo's death, where as the "horrible something" she has momentarily transgressed beyond the need for gender signification.

While this space imparts the residue of the racial and gendered violence of the quadroon ball, it also opens up to the spectacular possibilities of transgression and fluidity of these categories.

Dunbar-Nelson provides another queer iteration of the tragic creole in her story "Violets," which provides the title of her first published volume *Violets and Other Tales*. "Violets" while providing a straightforward sentimental narrative of a woman who is abandoned by her lover and dies, Dunbar-Nelson overlays this traditional representation of the tragic creole narrative with a suggested alternate lesbian-coded plot. "Violets" is a brief and fragmented story, divided into three sections, the first beginning with a quotation seemingly thought by the unnamed woman narrativizing the starting scene: "and she tied a bunch of violets with a tress of her pretty brown hair." The narrative then flashes to the presentation of a letter in the woman's possession. This letter is written by a female lover describing a bouquet of flowers sent as an Easter gift: "Violets, you know, are my favorite flowers, Dear, little, human-faced things! They seem always as if about to whisper a love-word; and then they signify that thought which passes always between you and me." The description of violets as "human-faced" provides another evocation of the human (feminized through the association with the flowers) as figured upon the natural landscape, or as I will discuss further in the next chapter, the symbolic equivalence between women and flowers. The description continues, providing personalized symbolic meanings of the other flowers included in the bouquet:

> The violets and pinks are from a bunch I wore to-day, when kneeling at the altar, during communion, did I sin, dear, when I thought of you? The tube-roses and orange blossoms I wore Friday night; you always wished for a lock of my hair, so I'll tie these flowers with them—but there, it is not stable enough; let me wrap them with a bit of ribbon, pale blue, from that little dress I wore last winter to the dance, when we had such a long, sweet talk in that forgotten nook. You always loved that dress, it fell in such soft ruffles away from the throat and bosom.

Section II of “Violets” immediately jumps a year into the future, again evoking Easter, and describes the corpse of a woman in a casket surrounded by the flowers from the bouquet described in Section I. Section III jumps again, presenting a man “in a distant city” who finds an old bouquet of flowers and asks his wife, “did you ever send me these?” She replies coldly, “You know very well I can’t bear flowers. How could I ever send such sentimental trash to anyone? Throw them in the fire.” The final line of the story provides an ambiguous hint of recognition as the husband burns the flowers: “Was it merely fancy on the wife’s part, or did the husband really sigh, — a long, quivering breath of remembrance.” On a straightforward level, the narrative of “Violets” reads as a tragedy of a Creole woman (potentially mixed-race and thus not a candidate for legitimate marriage) abandoned by a white male lover and dying as a result, while the man marries another (presumably white) woman with higher social status. Yet the ambiguity in Section I as to whether the woman described is the sender or recipient of the letter displayed on the table allows for a secondary queer reading in which the woman has received the love letter from another woman, a suggestion heightened by the letter’s language of “sin.” While the couple’s “sin” could be sexuality outside of marriage, discouraged by the Catholic church, same-sex eroticism would have been a greater religious taboo. The space of feminized intimacy evoked in the letter with the secluded “nook” further enhances this possibility, as does the narrative description lingering over the feminine decadence of the dress. Its “ruffles” around the “throat” and “bosom” provide an image suggestive of female genitalia, as well as an implied oral eroticism through emphasis on the “throat,” associated with queerness as non-reproductive sexuality. This points to an alternate reading with an obliquely hinted possibility that it was not the husband but the wife in the final section who had received the flowers from a feminine lover and that she then suppresses the reminder of this tragedy by insisting on her disdain for flowers.

A secondary queer-coded reading of this story is supported by the lesbian symbolism of violets. In addition to Victorian associations with sexual purity, violets in the *fin-de-siècle* period had a subcultural association with lesbianism stemming from Sappho's mention of violets in her poetry.[42] This association was particularly developed in French decadent writing, but it is not inconceivable that Dunbar-Nelson could have been aware of the violet's queer symbolism and encoded an unspeakable queer desire into her story. This possibility is further supported by biographical evidence that Dunbar-Nelson was likely bisexual and had same-sex lovers later in life, as Akasha Gloria Hull documents in her archival scholarship on Dunbar-Nelson's diary from the 1920s.[43] Dunbar-Nelson's diary published by Hull does not begin until 1921, so it is impossible to know the extent of her erotic sentiments and experiences with women at the time she published *Violets* and *Saint Rocque*. Her documented bisexuality, however, at least supports the possibility of a coded queer erotic in her depictions of the creole feminine in her earlier writings.

The "human-faced" violets become overdetermined and feminized symbols in this story alongside the creole or the "eternal feminine" of the bayou in Dunbar-Nelson's other writings.

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[42] While writing in the context of British literature, Kate Flint, in a reading of Charlotte Mew's 1894 short story "Passed," supports the symbolic associations of violets for *fin-de-siècle* lesbian subcultures, explaining that "violets had also, since Sappho's time, been linked to lesbian culture" (698) and "Violets recur not just in Mew's writing, and in that of her fin-de-siècle contemporaries […], but were to blossom in an even less coded way in early-twentieth-century writings, especially those of Renée Vivien" (699). Violets along with other references to Sappho arguably had this coded association in American queer subcultures during this time period as well.

[43] Hull explains that Dunbar-Nelson's admissions of same-sex desire and intimacy become more overt in her diary from this period: "During this period of her life, it becomes unequivocal that these [channels for her erotic energy] included romantic relationships with women. […] She also makes overt reference to homosexual individuals and reads Radclyffe Hall's lesbian classic, *The Well of Loneliness*, in 1929. Finally, in 1930, she hesitantly tells the story of her tempestuous affair with Fay Jackson Robinson, a younger newspaperwoman and socialite whom she encountered during her stay in California." (*Color* 95). Hull emphasizes the importance of what Dunbar-Nelson reveals about the formation of an undercover Black lesbian and bisexual community in the early twentieth century and speculates that although the archival documentation doesn't exist, Dunbar-Nelson could have engaged in same-sex relationships earlier: "Dunbar-Nelson's experience reveals the existence and operation of an active black lesbian network. All of these women were prominent and professional, and most had husbands and/or children. Somehow, they contrived to be themselves and carry on these relationships in what most surely must have been an extremely repressive context. Could it be that Paul's 'vile story' about Dunbar-Nelson—for which she left him in 1902—was somehow related to her sexuality?" (96)

With human faces they are thus personified, but do not speak or act, indicating a breakdown of the transmission of meaning as the queer is encapsulated in the unspeakable. The description of the woman's corpse is oversaturated with violets, aligning them not just with the failed romance, but her death:

> Slender, white fingers, idle now, they that had never known rest; locked softly over a bunch of violets; violets and tube-roses in her soft, brown hair, violets in the bosom of her long, white gown; violets and tube-roses and orange-blossoms banked everywhere, until the air was filled with the ascending souls of the human flowers.

The reference to her corpse through the synecdoche of "slender, white fingers" is echoed in the description of Flo's "white hands" in "A Carnival Jangle" (first published in the same volume). Dunbar-Nelson's description repeats "violets" to an excess and finally spectacularizes them (with the other flowers) as "the air was filled with the ascending souls of the human flowers," merging the woman's being into the flowers and enacting a similar symbolic transfer of the human feminine onto the natural that occurs through the "eternal feminine" in "By the Bayou St. John." Human identity thus abstracted into the overflow of flowers, "Violets" engages in a purging of excess similar to Flo's murder in "A Carnival Jangle," albeit in more subtle and less violent terms. Like the "eternal feminine" and the creole figure more broadly, the violets in this story provide a confluence of contradicting feminized meanings that undo a sense of individual identity and abstract individual personhood into a display of the spectacular in which significations become permanently unfixed. In this purging, the queer remains unsayable, barely legible, and undefined.

My next chapter continues to probe queered representations of the feminine creole as a figure of the region through references to flowers while moving to the context of early twentieth century French Antillean writing. While French Antillean *doudouism*, a genre that figures the region through the trope of the exotic and sexually available creole woman, who is often

compared to tropical flowers, is also feminized and associated with a nineteenth-century anti-modernity, the French Caribbean eroticization of the woman-as-flower differs from Dunbar-Nelson's abstracted "eternal feminine." For Dunbar-Nelson, the implantation of the feminine creole onto the landscape spectacularizes this figure away from concrete personhood, rendering her unavailable for the intimacy encapsulated in the *doudouist* flowers. The generation of a feminine creole excess in Dunbar-Nelson's writing instead leads to a radical indeterminacy and purging of individualizing meanings, positing the creole as a conduit towards modernist rupture and fungibility.

CHAPTER TWO

The Gendering of French Antillean Modernity: The "Female-Isle" and the "Plant-Man," Or from *Doudouism* to *Négritude*

In a 1931 article in *La Revue du monde noir*, a bilingual English and French Black diasporic literary and cultural journal edited by Jeanne and Paulette Nardal in Paris, M. Jean Louis proposes a definition of *créole* with a focus on its representation in French literature. While validating the intellectual contributions of Francophone creoles for an audience of people of color in Paris, Louis also reifies a stereotyped biological essentialism characteristic of the time, proclaiming that the creole "soul" is a hybridization of Africa and France:

> L'âme créole serait donc, un mélange intime de l'âme française telle qu'elle était au XVIIe siècle et de l'âme africaine, s'unifiant sous le ciel serein et doux des tropiques. Elle a donc pour caractéristiques : un amour qui nous semble déplacé aujourd'hui, de la lutte politique ou militaire, une fierté dans le caractère qui étonne dans notre siècle de démocratie et de platitude, un goût prononcé pour les choses de l'esprit et l'exercice des professions libérales. […] C'est grâce à ses qualités ancestrales et même à ses défauts que ce nouveau venu sur la planète, a joué un rôle de premier plan dans l'histoire politique et littéraire de la France (10)
>
> The Creole race seems to be then, an intimate blending of the soul of France such as it was in the 17th century and of that of Africa, under the mild and serene sky of the Antilles. It is characterized by a love of political and military strife which now-a-days seems to us somewhat out of keeping, a proud haughtiness which astonishes our day of democratic platitudes, a distinctive taste for the culture of the mind and the practice of liberal professions. […] Due to his ancestral inheritance and even to his failings this new-comer on our planet, has played a foremost part in the political and literary history of France. (10)[1]

While locating the creole in an anti-modern past, with a militarism "which now-a-days seems to us somewhat out of keeping," and "astonishes our day," and a cultural background hanging over from another time, "17th century" France combined with an ideal of an African past prior to

[1] In "Pour servir d'introduction à une étude sur l'Art et la Littérature creoles / Introduction to a Study on Creole Art and Literature." *Revue du monde noir*. vol. 1, pp. 8-11.

slavery, Louis also insists on the creole's relevance to his contemporaries. Focusing on cultural and national hybridization rather than explicitly on racial heritage, Louis' definition nevertheless locates a concept of "creole" at the center of the issues raised by the *Négritude* movement: the production and recognition of Black francophone literature and culture and an effort to establish a sense of identity by negotiating the ideal of a shared African past with the damaging legacy of slavery and European colonialism.[2]

The language of the hybridized "soul," in particular, resonates with the title of Suzanne Lacascade's 1924 novel, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine* (Claire-Solange, African Soul), which details the titular biracial Martinican Creole protagonist's move to Paris, provoking racial tensions with the white French side of her family. I will return to a more detailed discussion of Lacascade's novel later in this chapter but first aim to reexamine the *Négritude* movement in French Antillean modernism through a critical reevaluation of what came before: a feminized stylistics of *doudouism* that characterized prior French Antillean poetry, but also prose, through

[2] Defining the word *Créole* and the history of its usage in Francophone contexts, Chantal Maignan-Claverie presents a history of the term's importation from Spanish, similar to Anglophone contexts: "Le mot *Créole* est attesté en 1643 dans la langue française mais seulement en 1670 aux Antilles ; il est d'abord employé sous une forme substantif-adjectif avec la même signification que le terme espagnol, opposant donc le colon blanc autochtone aux Nègres et aux Sang-mêlé tout autant qu'aux immigrants européens. Mais très vite, dans l'espace antillaise dès la fin du XVIIe siècle, l'adjectif *créole*, par une large extension sémantique, va désigner tout natif des îles, et ce quelle que soit sa couleur" (59-60). "The existence of the word *Créole* is attested in the French language in 1643, but not until 1670 in the Antilles; it was first employed in the form of an adjective-substantive with the same meaning as the Spanish term, opposing the white native colonist to Black and Mixed-Race people, as well as immigrant Europeans. But very quickly in the Antillean space, from the end of the 17th century, the adjective *créole*, by a large semantic expansion, came to designate any native of the islands, of any race or color" (my translation). Yet in terms of the political signification of "*créole*," Maignan-Claverie argues that the impetus of this term remains ambiguous and ambivalent in its evocations of modernity and hybridity: "Le mot *créole* reste cependant ambivalent : il marque à la fois l'affranchissement des arrière-mondes (Europe, Afrique, Asie), la réimplantation dans un espace neuf, et la mémoire ou la trace du lieu originaire parentale et ancestrale. Le créole est d'ici et d'ailleurs, errant et enraciné, inscrit dans un projet trans-racial et transculturel. Toutefois, le terme *créole* pourra t'il effacer la macule coloniale qu'il porte encore, pour être assumé par l'ensemble de la communauté antillaise ?" (62). "The word *créole* remains ambivalent, however: it marks at once the liberation from prior worlds (Europe, Africa, Asia), re-implantation in a new space, and the memory or the trace of an originary parental and ancestral place. The *créole* is here and elsewhere errant and rooted, inscribed in a trans-racial and transcultural project. Yet might the term *créole* also erase the colonial stain it still carries, to be assumed by the ensemble of the Antillean community?" (my translation). See also my discussion of French and English dictionary definitions of *creole / créole* in the introduction.

its focus on the florid beauty of the tropical landscape, often metonymically figuring the island as an exoticized and eroticized creole woman. A *doudouist* stylistics traditionally assumes a white colonial male poetic voice that projects a fetishizing gaze onto the Antillean women of color by comparing her to tropical flowers. To critically interrogate the legacy of *doudouism*, which was harshly denounced by the *Négritude* writers for its production of racial stereotypes, I begin with the poetry of Drasta Houël, published in her 1916 volume, *Les Vies légères*, to ask what happens to the racializing exoticism of the creole woman when the stylistics of *doudouism* are reappropriated by a Martinican woman of color.

The story of Francophone Caribbean literature traditionally told is one of exoticism and the privileging of white, Eurocentric aesthetics until Aimé Césaire instantiated a revolutionary (de)colonial modernity through his valorization of Blackness and African heritage, spurring the *Négritude* movement with his famous poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of the Return to a Native Land*, first published in 1939). In *Éloge de la créolite*, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant provide a gloss of this history: "La négritude césairienne a engendré l'adéquation de la société créole, à une plus juste conscience d'elle-même. En lui restaurant sa dimension africaine, elle a mis fin à l'amputation qui générait un peu de la superficialité de l'écriture par elle baptisée doudouiste" (17).[3] As feminist critics such as Michelle Stephens and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting rightly argue, however, for all of its forceful challenges to Eurocentric cultural hegemony, *Négritude* was primarily a masculinist movement, dominated by the trio of great male writers from the colonies who met in Paris: Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Leopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), and Léon Gontran Damas (French Guiana).

[3] "Césaire's Negritude gave Creole society its African dimension,and put an end to the amputation which generated some of the superficiality of the so called doudouist writing" (Translated by Mohamed Taleb Khyar in *Callaloo*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1990, p. 888).

The most extensive scholarly history of French Antillean literature is produced in Jack Corzani's multivolume work, *La littérature des Antilles Guyane français* (The Literature of the French Antilles and Guyana), 1978. While acknowledging an extensive array of little-known writers prior to Césaire who produced literary journals, novels, travel writing, and volumes of poetry, Corzani's work does little to challenge the blanket dismissal of Antillean literature preceding Césaire as exoticist *doudouism*, characterizing Hoüel, for example, "par son narcissisme, par ses nostalgies de luxe, par son érotisme même, typique des créoles blancs" (Vol. 2 270).[4] While white male *doudouist* writers certainly reduced Antillean woman of various racial origins to complacent exotic and erotic objects to be possessed, the dismissal of all Antillean writing prior to *Négritude* as nothing more than racist stereotype has resulted in the scholarly forgetting and neglect of works by both female and male writers of color and a monolithic characterization of their writing as nothing more than a racist, exoticist *doudouism*.

But this monolithic critique of exoticist writing alone is not sufficient explanation for why a work like Suzanne Lacascade's *Claire-Solange, âme africaine* is discounted. Lacascade's novel in fact anticipates the politics of *Négritude* by explicitly critiquing *doudouist* racial stereotypes of the figure of the creole woman in the French literary tradition and presenting a valorization of Blackness to counter European racism. The complicated politics of Lacascade's novel, however, make it difficult to uphold as the foundation of a political movement like *Négritude*. *Claire-Solange* takes a conservative turn, particularly regarding the inevitability of heterosexual marriage with a white Frenchman, which dampens its protagonist's revolutionary

[4] "by her narcissism, by her nostalgia for luxury, even by her eroticism, typical of white Creoles" (my translation). It is possible that Corzani incorrectly racially identified Houël as a white writer, as suggested by Roger Little's introduction to Houël's writing (xi). Previous uncertainty surrounding her racial origins aside, the assumption that writing will reify exoticist stereotypes because it is produced by a white writer allows for an easy skipping over of textual analysis that has in turn reduced the contributions of French Antillean women writers in the early twentieth century to merely a footnote to the much-maligned *doudouist* literature.

critique of French discourses on race. And yet this political ambivalence is precisely why Lacascade's novel merits more critical attention. Along with Mayotte Capécia's *Je suis martiniquais*e (1948), Frantz Fanon uses this novel as an example of how Black Antillean women's writing validates attraction to white men and perpetuates the white European devaluation of Black masculinity. The harshness of Fanon's critique, however, has had the effect of dismissing two of the most prominent novels by Black Antillean women written prior to 1950 at the cost of discounting the possibility of a *Négritude* that is not exclusively masculinist and male oriented, while also negatively pathologizing both Black women's expressions of erotic desire and the construction of multiracial Creole identities. While none of the works of early twentieth-century Francophone Caribbean women writers are perfectly free of racial and gendered stereotypes so prevalent in the colonial cultural imaginary, to overlook these works in the archive would be to refuse to hear the voices of Black women and women of color from this era and ignore the representational possibilities of a French Antillean creole feminine. I would furthermore suggest that the devaluation of early twentieth-century Antillean literature as *doudousim* is not only due to a critique of the production of exoticist objectification of colonized women and racial stereotyping produced by white male writers, but also due to this literary style's feminized aesthetics in describing the beauty of flowers alongside the beauty of women. This devaluation of the feminine has prevented critics from reading a queer, non-hegemonic engagement with *doudouism* in the poetry of a creole woman of color like Houël. Focusing on the works of two Antillean women writers from the early twentieth century, Drasta Houël and Suzanne Lacascade, this chapter examines the resistant possibilities and politics of a feminized literary style leading up to the *Négritude* literary movement.[5]

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[5] In addition to Houël and Lacascade, francophone Caribbean women writers who have made notable contributions to literature preceding and during *Négritude* include Rénée Lacascade, who co-wrote the novel *L'île qui meurt / The*

The "female-isle": Drasta Houël's *Doudouism* and the Feminine Floral Erotic

Drasta Houël is one of few French Antillean women of color poets who preceded Césaire, and like many French Antillean writers of that era, regardless of race or gender, her work remains associated with the shortcomings of *doudouism*. Her only volume of poetry, *Les Vies légères* (Unencumbered Lives),[6] was published in Paris in 1916, after she had left Martinique following the catastrophic eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902 that destroyed the former capital of Saint-Pierre (Little vii).[7] In addition to her poetry, she published *Cruautés et tendresses* (Cruelty and Tenderness), a historical novel set during slavery, in 1925. While some scholars have classified Houël as a white writer, Roger Little insists on recognizing her Black ancestry (xi-xii). From the limited archival information available on Houël, it is not clear how she herself

Dying Island (1930) with her husband André Périye. In addition to Suzanne Césaire, Simone Yoyotte, Yva Léro, and Lucie Thésee were associated with the male *Négritude* writers and published work in literary journals such as *Légitime Défense* (Paris, 1932) and *Tropiques* (Martinique, 1941-1945). Irmine Romanette published poetry, the novel *Sonson de la Martinique* (1932), and coedited the literary review, *Le Trésor des Lettres* (Paris, 1933). In Guadeloupe, Oruna Lara, a male writer of color, published a novel, *Question des couleurs* (1923), multiple nonfictional books on the literature, culture, society, and history of Guadeloupe, and led a circle of Guadeloupean poets publishing in the journal *Guadeloupe Littéraire* (Guadeloupe, 1907-1914), which included frequent contributions by his wife, Agathe Réache and other female poets including Florelle Réache, Germaine Fanichineau, Julie Blondet, and Laure Eméric. I have not been able to find much information in my archival research on these Guadeloupean poets. Hélène Lémery has in some cases been identified as a Martinican writer as she was the daughter of a French colonial administrator and born in Martinique, although she lived most of her life in metropolitan France. Auguste Joyau included her in his *Anthologie des Poètes Martiniquais* (1959). Additional women writers mentioned by Corzani include Valentine Estoupe, Reine Beunier, and Marie Berté. More recently, scholars including T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Jacqueline Couti have reevaluated the importance of Paulette Nardal and Jeanne Nardal, who cofounded and coedited the French-English bilingual journal *Revue du monde noir* (Paris, 1931) and along with their sister Andrée Nardal hosted a literary salon and published several short writings. Further critical readings of all of these writers would greatly enhance an understanding of French Antillean literature, however the scope of this chapter limits my focus here to Houël and Lacascade. Of the earlier poets, I have chosen to focus on Houël in part because she published an entire volume of poems that Roger Little's series *Autrement Mêmes* has made available for current scholars, whereas the archive for some of the other poets I list is limited to only a few poems appearing in literary journals without biographical information.

[6] "Unencumbered Lives" is my translation of Houël's title. The literal meaning of the adjective *léger* is light weight, providing the connotation of slight, easy, and insignificant.

[7] Biographical information on Houël is from Roger Little's introduction to her works republished in the collection *Autrement Mêmes* that makes editions of out-of-print French language (post)colonial texts available for scholarship. Little's extensive archival research, with the support of Isabelle Gratiant, is the only source of biographical information I have found on Houël as there is very little concerning her available in public archives.

identified. To consider Houël as a person of color is to both acknowledge the privileged status granted by her light-skinned complexion in the racial hierarchy of French colonial society, and the resulting colorism and economic prejudice that may inform her perspective, while also crediting her as one of very few French Antillean women of color to have her writing published during this period.[8] Despite the political shortcomings of the *doudouist* poetic style, Houël's poetry merits greater critical attention. The poems published in *Les Vies légères* display a modernist aesthetic innovation in Houël's use of dashes, ellipses, and prose form. Her use of Creole language, including a series of poems written entirely in Martinican Creole, titled "Créoleries," accompanied by Houël's translations into Standard French, demonstrates a political impetus to valorize and poeticize a language that was racialized, associated with the lower class, grounded in the regional specificity of the French Antilles as opposed to metropolitan France, and considered informal and unsuitable for written expression.[9] Houël's poems take up and challenge the gender conventions of *doudouism* by addressing creole women through an erotic gaze, occasionally from the perspective of a masculine speaker.[10] By writing in the *doudouist* style as a woman of color and poetically eroticizing creole feminine figures, Houël queers this literary movement's exoticism and over-sexualization of the racialized creole women by shifting poetic voice away from the white male colonial perspective and instead providing a feminine creole erotic gaze while shifting between male, female, and non-gendered speakers.

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[8] Roger Little provides a dual interpretation of Houël's chosen pseudonym, Drasta, as on the one hand an anagram of the name of Adraste from Louis Joseph Adraste du Mosé Houël du Prey de la Ruffininère, a French colonizer from whom she was descended, and on the other hand as coming from Sanskrit in a potential ambiguous gesture of affinity with the Indian indentured workers who immigrated to the Caribbean (xii). Houël's given name was Marie Philomène Julie Simplice Hurard, and she was born in Saint-Pierre, Martinique in 1868. Her death is estimated to have occurred in 1949 in Paris, however Roger Little was unable to confirm this as a search for her death certificate in the municipal archives was unsuccessful (xiii).

[9] For the complete text of this series of poems, "Créoleries" alongside my translation of these poems into English, see the Appendix.

[10] Little also notes that some of Houël's poems take on a "masculine point of view," but does not go so far as to argue for the queerness of Houël's verse (xix).

Houël's chosen title, *Les Vies légères*, means lives that are unburdened or potentially frivolous. Scholars including Corzani, who have misidentified Houël as a white writer and assumed she was politically aligned with the conservative white colonial elite, have understood this title to be an expression of nostalgia for the decadence of the white colonial society.[11] I view Houël's title, however, as subtly ironic and inseparable from a retrospective knowledge of the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée that completely destroyed the possibility of life in Saint-Pierre, implying that these "lives" prior to the eruption are thus unburdened by the awareness of the tragedy that is to come, and ultimately their own end. Additionally, while Hoüel's poems are often romantic, unfolding in intimate spaces to depict a feminine erotic in keeping with the aesthetics of *doudouism*, I read her title not as an idealization of the leisure of the upper class, but rather an encapsulation of the stereotype of the indolent feminine creole who languishes in the tropical heat.[12] The force of this stereotype in the French cultural imaginary is demonstrated in the short essay "Martiniquaises d'aujourd'hui" (Martinican Women Today) by Marthe Oulié, a white French feminist and travel writer published in 1935 in *La Française* a journal of the early feminist movement:[13]

> On songe toujours aux Français des Iles comme à des privilégiés de la nature, qui laissent s'écouler la vie dans une demi-oisiveté. Qui dit : créole, dit nonchalance. […] Mais quand on les visite, on conserve de ces îles un souvenir laborieux. On travaille, malgré la pesante chaleur, dans les bureaux, dans les écoles. L'usinier est à son poste tard dans la nuit, et le travail sur son champ de cannes. Les femmes martiniquaises ne sont pas en dehors de ce grand mouvement qui de par le monde décuple et renouvelle l'activité féminine. (3)

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[11] See note 4.

[12] See the introduction for a discussion of French definitions of the term *créole* including its connotation of "indolence."

[13] I am indebted to Jennifer Anne Boittin's research on metropolitan French feminists and female travel writers during the early twentieth century in *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*, in particular for the discovery of Oulié's travel writings on the French Antilles. For a more in depth discussion of Oulié and other first-wave French feminists engagements surrounding the 1931 Exposition Coloniale in Paris, see Boittin's book. Oulié's article, "Martiniquaises d'aujourd'hui," was first published in *Le Journal* and then reprinted in *La Française*.

> We always think of the French of the Islands as the privileged in nature, who let their lives flow by in a half-idleness. When we say creole, we hear nonchalance. […] But once we actually visit the islands we hold onto a laborious memory. People work, in spite of the oppressive heat, in offices, in schools. The factory worker is at his post late at night, and the laborer is at his cane field. Martinican women are not exempted from this great movement that is all over the world perpetuating and renewing feminine activity"

While Oulié's perspective on Martinican women as a white French tourist and social reformer may be paternalistic and limited, her presentation and debunking of the stereotype of the indolent creole woman is notable, as is her recognition of the hardworking middle- and working-class Martinicans and the inception of a Martinican feminist movement. Houël would have doubtlessly been aware of the class conflicts between the white creole elite and the Black working class, which the bourgeois creole of color class that she belonged to was often caught between, and thus she would have likely had a perspective of Martinican social life beyond glorifying the leisure of the white colonials.[14]

Characterizing Houël's backward glance at Martinican life prior to the eruption as a misguided nostalgia for an aristocratic idleness misses another source of modernist rupture: the absolute destruction of Saint-Pierre in the volcanic eruption that caused the immediate death of nearly everyone present in the city at the moment it occurred. Citing Fanon's famous opening to

[14] Couti provides a historical overview of social changes in Martinique precipitated by the 1902 eruption of Mont Pelée but already in progress when this event took place. A particular source of social disruption coinciding with the eruption was an ongoing strike organized by agricultural laborers and factory workers in the sugarcane industry (Couti 43). Houël's paternal uncle (as confirmed by Little's genealogical research), Marius Hurard, was an important political figure of these changes. As Couti explains, "Hurard, for instance, was born into an underprivileged milieu as the illegitimate child of a poor single mother. However, he had a patron (probably his white Creole father) who enabled him to rise in status, and he eventually became a member of the French National Assembly (1881-93). His modest origins assured him of support from the Black proletariat during political contests, until he began to side with the white elite against the workers" (55). While it is not known how close Houël's family were to her father's brother, or whether they shared his shifting political sympathies, Couti's historical gloss provides a much more nuanced and complicated view of the position of middle class people of color in Martinique who on the one hand occupied a degree of social and economic privilege relative to the predominantly Black working class but on the other hand were only conditionally accepted or if not excluded by the white colonial elite on the basis of racial heritage. It is therefore not a given that having light skin aligned Houël's sympathies with the white creole elite.

Peau noire, masques blanc, "L'explosion n'aura pas lieu aujourd'hui. Il est trop tôt... ou trop tard" (25),[15] Chris Bongie posits Fanon's nonspecific explosion (which could be other things such as an anti-racist revolution) as an evocation of the catastrophe of Mont Pelée, suggesting that Fanon "invoke[s] the image of the volcano and the promise of the apocalyptic explosion that, as we have seen, is central to the poetics and politics of Caribbean modernism" (Bongie 316). Houël's *doudouist* aesthetics of an insular erotic world of beautiful flowers and women bathing is far from a representation of a city razed by lava and toxic clouds of ash. And yet, the encapsulation of Houël's imagery in an intimate erotic space, frequently tinged by evocations of death, suggests that this in fact could not occur today, that these scenes are out of time, fragmentary ruptures of something that is not or never was. By appropriating the cultural imaginary of creole decadence while tying it to a sense of rupture and destruction, Houël subtlely undermines and subverts the aesthetics of *doudouism*.

Houël's poem "La Croix du Sud" (The Southern Cross) performs a figuration of the landscape as a creole woman, like Emma Lazarus' poem "The South" discussed in Chapter 1. The Southern Cross constellation is more often visible in the Southern Hemisphere and the tropics, and thus connotes the geographical specificity of the Antilles as opposed to the French metropole in the Antillean regionalist context of Houël's poetry. Houël begins the poem with a direct address to the Southern Cross (using the French informal second-person grammatical form of *tu*), personifying her as both sexualized evocation of the landscape and a figure of religious purity:

> Je t'ai vue te lever, — splendide, un peu penchée, — sur la mer silencieuse, — pur bijou de nos nuits, — ô croix du ciel austral ! — Je t'ai vue te dresser — et embrasser

[15] Richard Philcox translates this as "Don't expect to see any explosion today. It's too early … or two late" (xi), but a more direct translation of the Fanon's first sentence would be "The explosion would not have happened today," which unlike Philcox's translation, suggests an attenuation of time in which the explosion in another moment did or would occur.

la terre — dans un grand geste d'amour — qui, au lieu d'une blessure, — faisait naître une étoile. — Comme des jardins de rêve — tel un chapelet de gemmes — dont tu étais la croix, — sous tes bras pathétiques. — paisibles, les îles dormaient : — l'onduleuse Anguilla, — la procession des Vierges, — les Grenadines, les Saintes, et Marie la Galante…

I saw you wake up, — splendid, leaning a bit, — over the silent sea — pure jewel of our nights, — o cross of the austral sky! — I saw you get ready — and kiss the earth — in a great gesture of love — that, instead of injuring, — gave birth to a star. — Like the gardens of dreams — that are rosaries of gems — on which you are the cross, — on your pleading arms. — peacefully the islands slept: — the undulating Anguilla, — the procession of Virgins, — the Grenadines, the Saints, and Marie la Galante…[16]

The Southern Cross is personified as a woman, waking up, getting ready, and becoming a lover to the earth.[17] This description is erotically suggestive and spectacularizes her through her association with the luxury of gems and her position as a star illuminating the sky. Houël further feminizes the Caribbean regional landscape by positioning the islands as women accompanying her, referencing islands named after female saints, the Virgin Islands, and other islands with feminized names.[18] Houël thus builds on cultural associations between the landscape and the femininized body characteristic of *doudouist* literature. In placing the female-personified constellation as the figure on the cross instead of Jesus, Houël replaces the male-centric version

[16] For this and all following excerpts from Houël, have restored the punctuation of this poem as printed in the original edition of *Les Vies légères* consulted at the archives in Paris (Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, a branch of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France). For more information on the text, see Note 1 on my translation of Houël's *Créoleries* in the Appendix.

[17] The word cross (*la croix*) is also grammatically feminine in French, resulting in a feminine address to the Southern Cross throughout the poem. While the descriptions of the Southern Cross clearly personify her and later cast her as the Virgin Mary, there is not a grammatical distinction between a person and an object when Houël refers to the Southern Cross.

[18] Anguilla is a British Overseas Territory in the Northeastern Caribbean, The Grenadines is an island chain between St. Vincent and Grenada, and Marie-Galante is a small island off the coast of Guadeloupe. "The procession of Virgins" seems to be a reference to the Virgin Islands, and the "Saintes" (grammatically feminine in French) likely refers to islands named after female saints such as Saint Lucia (Sainte-Lucie in French), or this could refer to a specific set of small islands that are part of Guadeloupe called the Îles des Saintes (also feminine). Houël's specific choice to provide the feminine plural form of "Saintes" with the added "e" seems notable since there are more larger islands named after male saints such as Saint Martin and Saint Kitts (Saint Christopher).

of Christianity with a feminine spiritual referent that is anchored in the regional landscape, analogizing the Southern Cross with the Virgin Mary:

> O croix que l'on croit vierge, — tu eus ton crucifié !... — Au seuil du Nouveau Monde, — tu l'attendis sans fin. — Les siècles roulaient en masse, — et les mondes se brisaient — sous tes pieds étincelants, — en laissant dans l'espace — de grands sillages d'or. — Tu attendais toujours, tes deux bras grands ouverts — pour prendre tout vivant — entre tes clous de flamme — l'homme qui allait doter — l'humanité d'un monde — et qui, pour le trouver, — gravissait un calvaire.
>
> Plus heureux que Jésus, — ô découvreur d'une terre ! — Colomb, ta croix fut d'or, — celle du Christ fut en bois.
>
> O cross that we believe to be a virgin, — you have your crucified! … — At the threshold of the New World, — you waited endlessly. — The centuries rolled by in a mass, — and worlds broke — under your sparkling feet, — while leaving — great golden wakes in space. — You always waited, with your two great arms open — to take in every living thing — between your flaming nails — the man who came to bestow — the humanity of a world — and who, in order to find it, climbed a calvary.
>
> More fortunate than Jesus, — o discoverer of a world! — Columbus, your cross was made of gold, — Christ's was made of wood.[19]

The ambiguity of Houël's exclamation, "O cross that we believe to be a virgin," allows for the symbolic allegorizing of the Southern Cross as the Virgin Mary giving birth to Jesus. However, the uncertainty of religious belief does not undo Houël's previous imagery of the Southern Cross' erotic greeting of the feminized island landscape, "kiss[ing] the earth — in a great gesture of love," which results in her becoming pregnant with the "star" that becomes "Jesus." This imagery becomes violent and destructive, however, as the engulfment of "every living thing" in flames evokes the volcano. The poem then shifts to recast the Southern Cross as a beacon to the "New World" which welcomes and protects everyone, perhaps especially the colonized, before reversing this signification by labeling her as the "discoverer" and shifting the apostrophic address to "Columbus." This complicated ambivalence in the representation of the Southern

[19] In the *Autrement Mêmes* publication, the final line of this poem includes an apostrophe to "Colon," meaning "Colonizer," however I have reverted to the original Paris archival version, which instead reads "Colomb," the francization of "Columbus," a more specific figure of the colonizer.

Cross as both the protector of the colonized and the colonizer perhaps references the paternalism in European discourses justifying colonialism. Houël suggests a potential violence to European provisions of protection while also celebrating a colonial decadence, emphasized by the golden cross, without acknowledgement of how European decadence was enabled through the production of luxury consumer goods through the exploitation of enslaved and indentured laborers. Yet Houël does not condemn the decadence of the golden cross while "Christ's was made of wood," and instead calls the Southern Cross "fortunate," using the term "heureux," which also means happy. Interestingly, the gendering at this point shifts from the feminine cross to the masculine "Columbus," implying the disruption of the feminine erotic scene of the constellation kissing the landscape by the masculinist intrusion of colonialism.

A traditional *doudouist* verse is more commonly associated with a group of predominantly, but not exclusively white male poets publishing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Martinique and Guadeloupe.[20] Richard Burton provides an overview of the gendered stylistics of *doudouism* in which the *doudou*, a beautiful woman from the Antilles, is exoticized and equated with the island landscape, particularly the local flowers to fulfill white male colonialist fantasies of erotic possession and control. Burton defines the *doudou* figure as "la femme de couleur souriante et sexuellement disponible qui se donne son corps et âme à un français de passage à la Martinique qui ne tarde pas à l'abandonner pour rentrer en France" (133).[21] Jacqueline Couti offers a more complicated definition of *doudou*, arguing that this term

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[20] In addition to the Guadeloupean periodical *Guadeloupe Littéraire* (see note 5), *doudouist* poetry was also published in the Martinican literary journal *Lucioles* (1927-1928), and the anthologies *Fleurs des Antilles* (1900) edited by René Bonneville from Martinique, and *Fleurs Tropicales* (1908), a response to Bonneville's anthology featuring Guadeloupean poets, edited by Oruno Lara. While *Fleurs des Antilles* is available on microfiche at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, I have been unable to locate a copy of *Fleurs Tropicales* in the archives and have only confirmed its publication from advertisements featured in *Guadeloupe Littéraire* and Jack Corzani's mention of it.

[21] "The smiling and sexually available woman of color who gives her body and soul to a French man passing through Martinique who will not hesitate to abandon her once returning to France."

only has this feminizing exoticizing connotation from the metropolitan French perspective, whereas "In French-Caribbean Creole, *doudou* simply means "darling," no matter the gender" (65). From the perspective of the metropole, however, Couti argues that the exoticized and eroticized perception of the creole women through the figure of the *doudou* reinforced ideologies of whiteness by transforming "the trope of the seductive and dangerous Antillean woman into a non-threatening desired object and desiring subject" (64). As a beautiful, exotic flower, the figure of the feminine creole can thus be controlled, contained, and made to uphold the hegemony of white colonial masculinity. Represented as a possessed flower, the *doudou* figure circles back to allow for colonialist fantasies of possession of the island and its people.[22] As Lambert Félix Prudent demonstrates, the islands themselves were commonly referred to in *doudouist* terms, reinforcing their metonymical possession by the white colonialist imaginary:

> Pendant toute la première moitié du XXe siècle, les slogans sentimentaux (« Haïti chérie », « Martinique l'île aux fleurs », « Guadeloupe île d'émeraude », etc.) foisonnent. Tout se passe comme si les compositions artistiques indigènes se devaient d'emprunter le vocabulaire doucereux et édénique du paternalisme pour arpenter l'espace créole. Le provincialisme, le régionalisme, le chauvinisme même sont alors de mise, et la chanson populaire (meringue haïtienne et biguine des Petites Antilles) met en scène des femmes aux amours frivoles dans un paysage de rêve. (119)[23]

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[22] Michael Dash provides an insightful analysis of how the Caribbean tropics were ideologically constructed in relation to Europe, with idyllic representations presenting a utopian alternative to Europe's failings: "The Caribbean archipelago, conceived as an absolute "elsewhere," as irreducibly different, was from its very inception invented as a blank slate onto which the entire exoticist project could be inscribed. The repercussions of intensive industrialization in Europe and colonization's backlash of global cultural hegemony created the need to see in the Tropics an antidote to Europe's sense of loss. The Tropics are then inscribed in terms of the primitivist project of a romantic otherness, a fetishistic opacity. In the desperate need to see the Tropics as utopian, alternative societies, the Caribbean emerges as the Crusoesque paradise of self-sufficiency, in contradiction to the dystopia of the plantation and dependency." (17)

[23] "During the entire first half of the 20th century, sentimental slogans ("Dear Haiti," "Martinique, the flower island," "Guadeloupe, the emerald island") proliferated. It all seemed as if native artistic compositions were required to borrow the sweetened and Edenic vocabulary of paternalism to survey the creole space. Provincialism, regionalism, and even chauvinism where thus instantiated, and popular songs (Haitian Meringue and the Biguine of the Lesser Antilles) depicted women engaging in frivolous love affairs in a dreamscape" (my translation).

In other words, as Isabelle Gratiant succinctly puts it, in Antillean literature from this period, “Les femme sont comme les îles – la métaphore est convenue – femme-île” (31).[24]

Daniel Thaly, one of the more well-known and prolific writers associated with this literary style, provides a clear example of *doudouism* as luxuriating in the exoticism of the creole woman/flower/island in his poem “Sur le Madras Martiniquais” (On the Martinican Madras), first published in his 1911 volume, *Chansons de mer et d’outre mer* (Songs of the Sea and Overeseas). This poem begins by extoling Martinican women, whom he later favorably compares to women from other nearby islands: “Martiniquaises, Martiniquaises, / « Poésie condensée de la terre créole » / Mulâtresses, câpresses, négresses, / Têtes un peu plus folles / Que vous portez bien votre madras souple et multicolore !”(1-6).[25] Referring to the Martinican women as “condensed poetry of the creole land” allows the poem to metonymically stand in for the creole woman and the woman to metonymically stand in for the creole land so that women/poem/landscape become one and the same. Exotically labeling the women, referred to through the synecdoche “heads,” as “crazy” and characterized by the bright coloring of the traditional madras scarf furthermore reduces them to exoticist stereotype. The listing of racial categories “Mulattas, Capresses, Negresses” implies a surveying, arranging, and classifying of female racialized bodies for the purpose of possession by the white male speaker. This listing also makes it clear that the ideal of creole femininity, while encompassing varying degrees of Blackness and whiteness, is fundamentally racialized through the colonial erotic gaze cast upon

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[24] “Women are like islands – the metaphor is widely understood – fem-isle” (my translation). In French, Gratiant’s compound “femme-île” (woman-island) would sound like *femelle*, meaning female, emphasizing the symbolic equivalence.

[25] “Martinican women, Martinican women, / “condensed poetry of the creole land,” / Mulattas, Capresses, Negresses, / Heads a bit more crazy, / Where you wear your supple and multicolored madras” (my translation). In the French Antilles, *câpre* (masc.) */ câpresse* (fem.) is an antiquated racial category for someone who is one quarter white. A foot note in the original publication from Thaly attributes the quotation in these lines to fellow *doudouist* writer John-Antoine Nau.

woman of color. Thaly ends with an emphatic equation of the Martinican women with the tropical flora and fauna: “Colibri, iris et papillon, / Jaune, rouge, vert et vermillon / Votre madras est élégant et fleuri, / Il est changeant comme vos coeurs / Et frondeur comme votre esprit” (17-21).[26] While traditional applications of the *doudouist* style, as exemplified by Thaly’s poem, do reduce the figure of the creole woman to a sexual object for a white metropolitan and colonial male gaze and imbue her with racist stereotypes, reading the few women poets, including Houël, who participated in Guadeloupe and Martinique’s literary circles of the time and appropriated the *doudouist* literary tradition should demonstrate the need for a reassessment of the blanket condemnation and dismissal of this genre, or for that matter the production of French Antillean writing prior to 1939.[27]

Following the *doudouist* literary style, several of Houël’s poems eroticize feminine bodies. While information about Houël’s sexuality or intimate relationships is not biographically available, these poems do seem to enact some level of personal intimacy, which allows for the possibility of reading the poetic voice as feminine. Houël thus provides a queered subversion of *doudouism* in which a poetic voice that is potentially feminine, racialized, and queer takes the place of the white masculinist colonial gaze. Houël’s poems in Creole allow for some distancing and obfuscation of queer subjectivity, as the original Creole language version is only available to

[26] “Hummingbird, iris, and butterfly / Yellow, red, green, and vermillion / Your madras is elegant and floral, / It is as changeable as your hearts / And as insubordinate as your spirit” (my translation).
[27] Another striking example of *doudouist* verse written by an Antillean women poet is “La Fleur que j’aime” (The Flower That I Love) by Laure Eméric published in *Guadeloupe Littéraire* in 1908. Like Houël’s poetry, Emeric’s example is also a prose poem that professes a deep aesthetic admiration of the forget-me-not flower that slips into eroticism and personifies this flower and offers up an apostrophic speech of adoration, as though the flower were a woman. *Fleur*, meaning flower, is a feminine noun in French, however Eméric goes beyond using feminine grammatical forms and addresses the flower as “mon amie” / “my (female) friend.” It is also worth noting that in French the term “amie” can mean both friend and girlfriend and there is not necessarily a clear distinction in French vocabulary between a friendship and romantic relationship. I have not found any biographical information about Laure Eméric (including her racial heritage or class background) or additional published writing by her except for the short essay “Tante” (Aunt), recounting childhood memories of her aunt published in a later issue of *Guadeloupe Littéraire* (no. 37, 1908).

as select group of Creole speakers, and therefore obscured from a metropolitan French audience. Her poems written directly in Standard French address feminine figures, casting them as possibilities sources of erotic intimacy, while displacing the involvement of the speaker or poetic self by making the feminine object of desire a non-human sculpture, in the case of "Porteuse de Café" (Woman Carrying Coffee) or omitting any personal or gendered identificatory markers for the poetic voice. The poem "Sur la Véranda" (On the Veranda) clearly enacts a personal intimacy through Houël's dedication of this poem to Agnès H. Although Houël's personal relationship to her is unknown, a literary dedication implies a level of intimacy and relation while instantiating the poet's own subjectivity in writing the poem.[28] This sense of the construction of an intimate poetic space is further established by Houël's inclusion of this poem in a series titled "Intimités" (Intimacies). "Sur la Véranda" describes an erotic scene in which at least one woman is bathing, yet the depersonalized presence of the poetic voice implies a queer sexual intimacy:

> Dans un coquillage — d'eau claire rempli, — la rose achevait — sa vie éphémère. — Le temps qui passait, — paresseusement, — au chant des fontaines, — buvait son sang pâle. — Ainsi que des larmes, — un à un glissaient — ses pétales tendres — avec un sanglot — que, seule, recueillait, — l'âme d'une femme — dans un rêve d'amour — et de poésie. — Puis l'heure sonna, — à l'horloge brève, — et ce fut le choc — dont la rose mourut — en un croulement doux, — sur la natte d'aloès.
> Deux mains ramassèrent — sa dépouille blanche, — et, dans les paumes pleines — de cette jonchée mate, — un front se baigna, — passionnément — et très longuement.
>
> In a seashell — filled with clear water — the rose completed — it's fleeting life. — Time passed, — lazily, — to the song of the fountains, — and drank its pale blood. —

[28] I have been unable to find any fellow French Antillean writers or intellectuals from the period when Houël was writing named Agnès with a surname beginning with an H. Since Houël's given surname was Hurard, and her pseudonym Houël comes from her mother's family, it is possible that Agnès H. could be a relative on either the Hurard or Houël side. The name Agnès, however does not feature in the incomplete genealogy that Little provides and the genealogical records that Little cites appear to no longer be publicly available. Interestingly, the original publication features an ellipses after the initial "H." It is unclear whether Houël uses this punctuation to merely imply the abbreviation of the surname (she also uses ellipses in the dedication of another poem, "La Case," to the "painter Antoine H…" but only marks the abbreviation of her dedication of "Pa tué co Zote" to "Georges V." with a single period).

While tears, — one by one slid over — its tender petals — with a sob — that, alone, was gathered, — by the soul of a woman — in a dream of love — and poetry. — Then the clock struck, — briefly — and it was a shock — that caused the rose to die — in a soft crumble, — on the braided aloe.

Two hands gathered — its white corpse, —– and, in the full palms — of that dull mess, — a forehead bathed itself, — passionately — and for a very long time.

While there is at least one person clearly present in the scene, Houël obscures the human figures through synecdoche and disconnected body parts ("Two hands gathered," "the full palms," "a forehead"), personification of the rose, and other abstractions of a woman away from a living body ("the soul of a woman," "her white corpse"). When read literally, this poem describes and personifies natural objects – the seashell, the rose, the aloe – to examine the fleeting beauty of nature. Yet, the personification of the rose and intensified intimacy implied between two figures gestures towards the possibility of a dual interpretation of this poem as enacting an intimate scene between two women. The abstracted personification of "time" drinking the rose's blood is, on the one hand, a poetic figural representation of the rose losing its life force with age, and on the other and, a sexually evocative image of intimate bodily exchange.[29] The "tears" seem to come not from the rose but from another figure crying over it, and these tears are then registered "by the soul of a woman — in a dream of love." After the rose dies, it is gathered by "two hands," leading to the image of a "forehead" bathed "passionately — and for a very long time," with Houël's use of indirect voice concealing the active grammatical subject. Houël's stylistic dashes that fragment her sentences work to obscure meaning and present the poem as more of a gesture than a concrete representation. The imagery of the two figures is fragmented and tangled

[29] A precedent for the eroticized comparison of the woman's body to a bleeding rose can be found in Stéphane Mallarmé's poem "Les Fleurs" (1983): "Et pareille à la chair de la femme, la rose / Cruelle, Héroidiade en fleur du jardin clair, / Celle qu'un sang farouche et radieux arrose !" (10-12). "And, like the flesh of a woman, the cruel rose, / Hérodiade blooming in the garden light, / She that from wild and radiant blood arose!" (Translation by Henry Weinfield). Weinfield's translation of the final term as "arose" preserves the French homophonic resonance with "rose," but alters the imagery. In French, the verb Mallarmé uses, *arroser*, means "to water" (as in a plant), providing an image of the rose watered with blood.

to the extent that it becomes difficult to determine the subject referents, indicating a physical enmeshment of the various parts. While evoking the classic association between death and orgasm, the poem also hints at sexual intimacy through references to love, passion, and physical entanglement.[30] Furthermore, the imagery of the poem is deeply feminized through the traditional associations of flowers and the fluidity of water (the tears, bathing, the seashell) with femininity and Houël's evocation of "the soul of a woman." This overlaying of erotic femininity and the beauty of nature makes this poem clearly *doudouist*, but Houël's presentation of a queered, ambiguous, and abstracted *doudouism* challenges the typical assumption of a colonial male gaze. Houël's audience would likely not have read a lesbian love scene into the nuanced fragmentation of this poem, yet her obliqueness gestures towards the possibility of subversion that queers the *doudouist* gaze upon the erotic feminine creole figure.

Houël's engagement with a stylistics of eroticism, particularly an eroticism that veers into decay and death, finds precedent in the French literary tradition, especially in Charles Baudelaire's exoticizing and eroticizing portrayal of women alongside the symbolism of the flower in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857).[31] In addition to casting an erotic gaze at often racialized femininity, Baudelaire's poetry conveys a negative eroticism imbued with decay, as Elissa Marder argues:

> Baudelaire's flowers of evil are not ephemeral manifestations of an ideal of beauty, but rather sexualized, time-sensitive bodies whose beauty is always infected by their complicity with sexual reproduction and inflected with their communicative proximity to the sexual act through the diffusion of their pungent odors and their susceptibility to becoming abject and monstrous as they fade and die. (4)

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[30] In French, an orgasm can be referred to euphemistically as "la petite morte," meaning "little death."

[31] Particular precedents for a racialized exoticism in Baudelaire's poetry include "À une Dame créole" (To a Creole Lady), which was written about a white creole woman from Mauritius whom Baudelaire met while traveling in Réunion, as well as the series of poems to Baudelaire's lover, Jeanne Duval, a Black woman who may have been from Haiti, but her origins have not been definitively established. I will discuss "À une Dame créole" in more detail in my reading of Suzanne Lacascade's *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, as Lacascade specifically references this poem.

With Houël, as with Baudelaire, this "abject and monstrous" sexuality can take on a queer undertone. Houël's poems such as "Sur la veranda" eroticize the decaying ephemeral body or the wilting flower without envisioning a reproductive futurity.[32] Georges Bataille's psychoanalytic theory on eroticism as it relates to the symbolism of flowers provides further insight on the representation of the erotic and decaying flower in both Baudelaire and Houël's poetics. In his essay *The Language of Flowers*, Bataille examines the symbolic eroticization of flowers in association with women's bodies, or in Bataille's words, "qu'une belle fille ou une rose rouge signifient l'amour."[33] In Bataille's view, the feminized erotic symbolism of flowers is generated not only by their beautiful appearance, but also because their rapid decay and revolting connection to earthly matter serves as a reminder of the abject:

> Les fleurs elles-mêmes, perdues dans cet immense mouvement du sol vers le ciel, sont réduites à un rôle épisodique, à une diversion d'ailleurs apparemment incomprise : elles ne peuvent que contribuer, en brisant la monotonie, à la séduction inéluctable produite par l'impulsion générale de bas en haut. Et il ne faudrait pas moins, pour détruire l'impression favorable, que la vision fantastique et impossible des racines qui grouillent, sous la surface du sol, écœurantes et nues comme la vermine.[34]

According to Bataille, the erotic thus relies upon the taboo and the abject, as he further emphasizes in his book *L'Érotisme*: "la connaissance de l'érotisme, ou de la religion, demande une expérience personnelle, égale et contradictoire, de l'interdit et de la transgression" (39).[35]

[32] Baudelaire also provides a precedent for a poetic eroticism of queer femininity with his lesbian poems "Femmes damnées" (Damned Women) and "Lesbos." As the title of the first implies, Baudelaire's eroticization of lesbian sexuality hinges on its taboo, further demonstrated by the censoring of these and other poems from *Les Fleurs du mal* following an obscenity trial after the book's publication in 1857.

[33] "that a beautiful woman or a red rose signifies love."

[34] "Flowers themselves, lost in this immense movement of sky to earth, are reduced to an episodic role, to a diversion, moreover, that is apparently misunderstood: they can only contribute, by breaking the monotony, to the inevitable seductiveness produced by the general thrust from low to high. And in order to destroy this favorable impression, nothing less is necessary than the impossible and fantastic vision of roots swarming under the surface of the soil, nauseating and naked like vermin." (Translated by Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr.). Bataille's essay "The Language of Flowers" was first published in *Documents*, no. 3, 1929.

[35] "Knowledge of eroticism, or of religion, requires a personal experience of prohibition and transgression that is both equal and contradictory."

While Bataille does not frame the taboo of eroticism in terms of queer sexuality, he does locate sexual transgression in anti-reproductive associations with death. In an analysis of "auto-exoticism" in French Antillean literature, Nathalie Schon further connects erotic taboo to literary exoticism, arguing that sexual desire for the exoticized colonial woman was construed as a "perversion" in psychoanalytic discourses:

> La littérature exotique du XIXe siècle est ainsi assimilée à une vision de l'Autre, née du colonialisme, époque regrettable qu'il s'agit de dépasser définitivement. En effet, l'exotisme est associé à la honte, voire à la maladie mentale : l'intérêt érotique pour la « belle indigène » a, depuis l'apparition de la psychanalyse, de plus en plus réputation de perversion. (Schon 13)[36]

Interestingly, the term "perversion" was also applied to homosexuality and other forms of sexual deviance by the psychoanalysts of this period. In explaining how the exoticism of *doudouist* aesthetics could in itself constitute a taboo, Schon provides a framework for a queer reading of *doudouism.* Schon defines "auto-exoticism" as a sort of colonial double-consciousness in which the self is viewed through the exoticizing gaze of the metropole, resulting in the "sentiment d'être étranger à soi-même," "the feeling of being foreign to oneself" (10). Shon's conception of "auto-exoticism" is particularly pertinent in the case of Houël's appropriation of the exoticist gaze upon the Martinican woman of color, the position she herself occupied, and the transformation of this position into the desiring poetic voice.

Schon's conception expands upon the theory of exoticism René Ménil lays out in his 1959 essay "De l'Éxotisme colonial" (On Colonial Exoticism).[37] In this essay, Ménil laments in particular an "exotisme fondé en nature," "an exoticism founded in nature", arguing that this

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[36] "Exotic literature from the 19th century was thus assimilated into a vision of the Other, born from colonialism, a regrettable era that the goal was to definitively move past. In effect, exoticism is associated with shame, as in mental illness: the erotic interest in the "beautiful native woman" has had, since the arrival of psychoanalysis, a greater and greater reputation of perversion" (my translation).

[37] Martinican writer René Ménil also notably co-edited *Légitime Défense* with Étienne Léro and *Tropiques* with Aimé Césaire.

aesthetic reduces the colonized person to décor (139). Echoing Fanon's famous formulation of feeling the white gaze constructing his Blackness through the child's cry of "Look! A Negro!" in *Peau noir, masques blancs / Black Skin, White Masks*, Ménil describes a similar sensation of perceiving the self as exotic through the white colonial gaze: "La characteristique fondamentale de l'existence humaine dans la société colonial, c'est d'être séparée d'elle-même, d'être exilée d'elle-même, d'être étrangère pour elle-même" (140).[38] This is why, according to Ménil, when colonial writers try to deliberately write outside of an exoticist mode they end up reproducing the same dynamic, for "la base du processus poétique c'est la structure même du régime colonial," "the base of the poetic process is the very structure of the colonial regime" (141). Ménil's critique thus raises the question of whether a writer like Houël can find agency in poetic expression through an "auto-exoticist" mode, yet Ménil suggests a lack of alternatives when writing in a colonial society. While there may not be an available outside to colonial structures of thought, it is my reading of Houël's appropriation of exoticism that she does subvert these aesthetics to generate a limited agency by recasting the object of exoticism, the creole woman, as the poetic speaker.

Houël's series of five poems titled *Créoléries*, first written in Martinican Creole and then translated by Houël into Standard French, constitute a queering of verse through both the breach of French literary language in poeticizing Creole and the fluid representation of gender. In addition to shifting the *doudouist* style away from the white male poet's exoticization of the Antillean woman of color, Houël's poetry queers the perspective of desire through shifts and ambiguity in the grammatical gender of the referent, which allows for the poetic expression of

[38] "The fundamental characteristic of human existence in a colonial society is to be separated from oneself, to be exiled from oneself, to be foreign to oneself" (my translation). The term "étrangère" can mean both foreign and a stranger in French.

love to read as queer eroticism. In her poem "Philtre d'amour" (Love Potion), the unnamed beloved shifts from male to female grammatical gender, as shown by my added emphasis:

> Moin trouvé dans fond potiche moin — yon philtre d'amou, l'amou, metté ! — Ou save, poutant **chè l'amou-moin** — plus bon philtre là, ou save li bien, — cé pa ta qui dans potiche là, — plus bon philtre-là, cé deux zieux vou — qui ka ranne moin con papillon — devant chandelle qui ka clairé !… — cé belle cheveure, **chè tréso moin** ! — qui prend coeu moin — con yon filet ka prend poisson ; — qui vloppé li con soie maïs — ka emmailloté z'épi-li ! — Plus bon philtre là, tanne, **l'amou moin** ! — cé baisers vou qui dou pon bouche — con pomme cannelle pou sucrier… — Cé pa la peine, cé pède temps vou — que metté philtre dans potiche moin. — Châme là cé ou, chez **z'amie moin** ! — pa allé chèché li ailleu…
>
> J'ai trouvé dans ma potiche, — un philtre d'amour qu'y mit l'amour !... — Tu sais pourtant, tu le sais bien, — le meilleur philtre, **mon cher amour**, — n'est pas celui de la potiche : — ce sont tes yeux, mon cher amour ! — tes deux yeux qui me rendent pareil — au papillon devant la lampe ! — c'est ta chevelure qui prend mon coeur — comme le filet prend le poisson ! — qui l'enveloppe comme le maïs — se trouve enveloppé dans ses soies. — Le meilleur philtre, mon **cher trésor**, — c'est ton baiser, dont la saveur — est aussi aimée de ma bouche — que la pomme-cannelle de l'oiseau ! — Je te le dis, c'est perdre ton temps — que mettre des philtres dans ma potiche. — Le charme c'est toi, **ma bien-aimée** ! — ne va pas le chercher ailleurs.
>
> I found inside of my vial — a love potion! — you know this, however **my dear love** — the best potion, as you well know, — is not the one from the vial, — it's your eyes — your two eyes that make me — a butterfly in front of a lamp!... — it's your lock of hair, **my dear treasure**! — that captures my heart— like a hook catches a fish; — that envelops it like corn — finds itself enveloped in its silks! — the best potion, **my love**! — is your kiss, which my mouth — loves as much as the bird's sugar apple… — telling you is a waste of your time — like putting potions in my vial. — You are the charm, **my beloved**! — don't go looking for it elsewhere…[39]

While Martinican Creole does not have the grammatical gender structure of French, I read Houël's choice to add a feminine ending to the Creole "z'amie" as intentionally feminizing this term following French grammar conventions.[40] This shift is mirrored in Houël's French version

[39] For a discussion of my translation methods for Houël's Creole poems, see Note 1 in the Appendix.

[40] Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux unambiguously states that Creole texts should not be read through the lense of French grammatical gender: "théoriquement le genre n'existe dans aucun des créoles de la zone. […] Notons que bien des mots créoles qui à une oreille française semblent un féminin n'en sont pas" (413). "In theory, gender does not exist in any of the creole languages from this region. […] Note that even creole words that sound feminine to

which uses a masculine address for the lover, "mon cher amour," while staging a grammatical transformation to the feminine with "ma bien-aimée" at the end. Houël's maintaining of the lover's gendered fluidity in French emphasizes the intentionality of a final feminine gendering in her creole version. Due to the gender neutrality of creole language, when taken alone without the French comparison, the entire poem could be read as erotically addressing a woman based on the express feminization of the final term of address. Houël's translation of Creole to French seems to directly preserve her choices in language (although she makes some notable changes to the punctuation between the Creole original and the French translation, which would not be required by grammatical differences in the languages).[41] These differences in punctuation indicate the inexactness of Standard French as a substitute for the Creole original, the inability to fully transpose meaning, even if the words are directly translated. The ellipses present in the Creole original and absent or displaced in the French translation work alongside the dashes that characterize Houël's poems to provide a greater fluidity and flexibility of meaning that enhances

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French ears are not" (my translation). While Hazaël-Massieux's note about Creole linguistics suggests a cautionary approach in interpreting gender in Creole texts by applying French grammatical structure, I believe a comparative analysis of Houël's translations of her Creole poems into French and a comparison of the orthography and grammar between the Creole poems supports my argument that Houël produces ambiguity surrounding the gender of the beloved in this poem, suggesting a potentially feminine subject of address. I have added emphasis to indicate the shift in gender of the referent in Houël's French translation. In French grammar, adding an "e" to a noun or vowel typically makes it grammatically feminine. In the Créole version, "ché l'amou" (cher amour / dear love) would be gender-neutral, whereas "chez z'amie moin" (translated as "ma bien-aimée," "my beloved") adds the feminine "e" and the feminine article "ma" in the French version. As a primarily oral language, Creole would not have had a standardized orthography, however Houël's spelling of the Creole term for friend as "z'ami" in her poem "Mieux sé vo mô / Plutôt mourir" to indicate a masculine form suggests that her addition of the feminine ending in "Philtre d'amour" was an intentional choice.

[41] Houël omits from the French version three ellipses that she includes after "devant chandel qui ka clairé!... / devant la lampe! / in front of a lamp!", "con pomme cannelle pou sucrier… / que la pomme-cannelle de l'oiseau ! / as much as the bird's sugar apple!" and at the end of the poem, while instead displacing one of these ellipses to the beginning: "yon philtre d'amou, l'amou, metté ! / un philtre d'amour qu'y mit l'amour !..." Moreover, she adds a colon to the French version: "cé pa ta qui dans potiche là, / n'est pas celui de la potiche : / is not the one from the vial:" but then changes a semicolon included in the Creole original to an exclamation point in the French version: "con yon filet ka prend poisson ; / comme le filet prend le poisson ! / like a hook catches a fish!". The placement of the exclamation points also varies between the two versions with some of the other punctuation in the Creole being replaced by exclamation points in French. In my translation, I have attempted, where possible, to follow the punctuation of the Creole version.

the queer grammatical structure of the poem through its shifts in gendered markers.[42] By writing prose poems, Houël has already eschewed traditional forms of French verse. [43] Rather than line breaks, Houël uses dashes as interruptions and continuations between phrases and innovates her own poetic form that could be considered modernist through the indications of rupture,

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[42] In her linguistic analysis of French Créole language in *Lang a fanm : Ou ce que le créole dit des femmes !,* Marie-Rose La Fleur explains that some variations of French Créole avoid the grammatical gendering of Standard French: " Parler du féminin en créole, revient à parler du genre. On a tendance à dire que les genres masculin/féminin n'existent pas en créole, car ils n'apparaissent pas au niveau grammatical. L'usage des déterminants ne permet pas la distinction féminin/masculin" (31) "Discussing the feminine in Creole circles back to gender. There is a tendency to say that the masculine/feminine genders do not exist in Creole language because they aren't present on a grammatical level. The usage of determinants does not permit the masculine/feminine distinction" (my translation). La Fleur furthermore notes that gender in language is more commonly established through cultural metaphors: "Les mots au féminin sont rares en créole. Il s'agit plutôt de faire jouer la métaphore sexuelle dans des domaines considérés consciemment ou inconsciemment comme relevant d'attitudes ou d'activités féminines. Si l'on considère que la langue est sexiste, on pourrait penser à première vue que le créole l'est moins que la langue française qui absorbe le féminin par le masculin. Car dans une pièce où il y a cent femmes et un homme, la règle grammaticale en français requiert le masculin pluriel « ils » alors que pour le créole il n'y a pas d'absorption du fait de la présence d'un homme parmi des femmes, on utilise à chaque fois le pronom personnel *yo*, « ils ou elles »." (33) "Feminine words are rare in Creole. The distinction is more often made by playing on the sexual metaphor in domains that are consciously or unconsciously considered as relevant to feminine attitudes or activities. If we consider the language to be sexist, we must first realize that it is much less so the case that the feminine is absorbed by the masculine in Creole than in French language. If there are one hundred women and one man in a single room, French grammatical rules require use of the masculine plural pronoun 'ils' [meaning they/the men], whereas with Creole there is no absorption based on the presence of a single man amongst a group of women. The personal pronoun *yo*, « ils ou elles » [meaning they/the men or the women] is always used" (my translation). Creole's avoidance of the gendered articles used in Standard French could thus further work to obscure the queerness of Houël's poetry, however Houël's feminized style referencing flowers, beauty, and an excess of exclamations that interject emotion, when written by a female poet about love for a seemingly feminine subject work to create an exclusively feminine erotic space in her work.

[43] While the genre of the prose poem precedes modernism, it still constitutes a rupture of traditional poetic verse. Baudelaire's *Poèmes en Prose*, published in 1869, after his death provide an important precedent for the prose poem in the French literary tradition. Writing about Baudelaire's innovating productions of the prose poem, Barbara Johnson argues that this genre "remet le système tout entier en question," "puts the entire system in question" (9). Johnson continues, "Que dire, alors, d'un corpus littéraire, aussi hétéroclite qu'indéniable, dont le genre ne peut être nommé que par une expression qui fait éclater la notion même de genre ? Suffit-il de suspendre la contradiction entre poésie et prose pour que l'idée de genre ne fasse plus problème ?" (9). "What can be said, then, about a literary corpus as heterogeneous as indisputable, of which the genre cannot be named except with an expression that explodes the very notion of genre? Does it suffice to suspend the contradiction between poetry and prose so that the idea no longer poeses a problem?" (my translation). While the prose poem was not new in French literature by the time of Houël's writing, it was still a divergence from the standard form when Houël's Antillean peers tended to write in more traditional verse forms to instantiate themselves within the French literary tradition. Isabelle Gratiant characterizes Antillean poetry from the beginning of the twentieth century in this way: "Cette poésie s'exprime à travers les cadres traditionnels. L'alexandrin et le sonnet sont les formes les plus largement utilisées. Pourtant les licences symbolistes, le vers libre, les poèmes à forme variable tentent nos poètes" (79). "This poetry was largely expressed through traditional structures. The alexandrine and the sonnet were the most widely used forms. However, the license of the Symbolists, free verse, and poems with variable form tempted our poets" (my translation).

hesitation, and ambiguity typically associated with dashes and other grammatical breaks. The imagery of this poem suggests an enclosed and space, which allows for queer intimacy to unfold. The enclosed imagery of the addressee's hair enwrapping the speaker suggests intimacy, while the series of somewhat trite similes that participate in a *doudouist* aesthetics analogize the woman's body parts (eyes, hair, mouth) to nature.[44] The clichéd aspect of Houël's similes further participates in the interplay of literary *doudouism* with popular verse.[45] The poem's production of a "love potion" furthermore instantiates a Caribbean regionalism based in folk culture as this suggests Caribbean religious practices of Quimbois, Obeah, and Voodoo.[46]

In the very limited scholarship on Houël, Roger Little, Jack Corzani, and Isabelle Gratiant have all recognized a modernist stylistics in Houël's writing, which breaks from the traditional forms of French verse such as the alexandrine.[47] The innovative production of the five poems that comprise Houël's *Créoleries* in Martinican Creole language should not be

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[44] While some of the natural imagery Houël uses is geographically non-specific (the butterfly, the bird, corn), the *pomme cannelle* (sugar-apple) is a tropical fruit native to the Caribbean.

[45] This aesthetics has also been identified in traditional popular songs such as "Adieu foulard, adieu madras," which Burton analyzes as a prime example of *doudouism.*

[46] The specificity of Caribbean folk culture in Houël's references is additionally developed through the mythology of the "zombie" in her Creole poem "Adieu bonheu !" in which the curse of the zombie provides a narrative rationale for the speaker's romantic rejection. European folk culture may also provide a base for references to magic and potions, however the regionalist specificity of Houël's other references such as the "zombie" and native plants and her poeticization of Creole language grounds this poem in a Caribbean cultural mythology. Baudelaire again provides a point of comparison in French literature, for example in his poem "Hymne à la beauté" from *Les Fleurs du mal* stating "tes baisers sont un philtre," "your kisses are a potion" (7). As one of the poems dedicated to Jeanne Duval, Baudelaire's evocations of potions and magic in this and other poems that eroticize feminine figures dedicated to Duval could actually be in reference to her presumed Haitian origins.

[47] Corzani provides very brief commentary on Houël's poetry, praising her innovative style: "*Les Vies légères* avaient tout d'abord l'immense mérite de rompre avec la prosodie classique et de rechercher dans le poème en prose rythmée la source d'une musique nouvelle, plus subtile, plus fluide, à l'image d'un univers délicat, à la fragilité menace" (Corzani 262). "*Les Vies légères* demonstrated, above all, the immense merit of breaking away from classic prosody and finding a new musical rhythm in the prose poem that was more subtle, more fluid, and imagined a delicate universe, one of threatened fragility" (my translation). Little goes further in a detailed overview of Houël's prosody, which in which he argues Houël "fait jouer la modernité contre le classicism" / "plays modernity against classicism" (xvi). For a more detailed structural analysis of Houël's prosody, see Little's introduction to the *Autrement Mêmes* edition of her collected works. Gratiant's analysis of Houël focuses on her novel rather than her poetry, however, Gratiant characterizes Houël's novel *Cruautés et tendresses* as "d'une étranger modernité" / "of a strange modernity" (101), despite of its engagement with non-modernist genres as a slave narrative and historical fiction.

understated at a time when Creole was primarily an oral language, not considered a source of literary production, and racialized as pertaining to the Black working class, in spite of the fact that it was very widely understood by both white and Black inhabitants of the Antilles.[48] Houël labels each of these Creole poems as a "poème nègre," or "Black poem," in a racial sense, while labeling the French version as a translation. This labeling further emphasized the racial associations of Creole language and casts these love poems as occupying both a racialized and eroticized space of Blackness. In addition to valorizing Creole language, Houël's interplay between French and Creole in the sequence of poems that constitutes her *Créoleries* produces a poetic space of innovation, fluidity, and intimacy that allows for the expression of a queered subjectivity and subversion of racial categories. According to Isabelle Gratiant, to the elite class of people of color in which Houël was born, while French was the language of education, literature, and formal affairs, Creole occupied a different place of intimacy: "le créole était

[48] Haitian writers in particular have provided an earlier precedent for writing in Creole language, and Martinican poet Gilbert Gratiant would later become one of the first Martinican poets to write extensively in Creole. In an overview of Caribbean literature written in French Creole language, Lambert Félix Prudent identifies François Achille Marbot's *Les bambous* (1826, Martinique), Oswald Durand's *Choucoune* (1884, Haiti), Alfred Parepou's *Atipa* (1885, French Guyana), and Paul Baudot's writing (Guadeloupe) as important precedents. Prudent, however notes a conservative and racializing impulse amongst the white writers in particular of this period who wrote in Creole, arguing that "le texte créole doit amuser, égayer, defender une idéologie conservatrice, et surtout il repose sur un socle antérieur français. C'est une créolité de la transposition des fables, de poèmes, d'opérettes, une littérature de la copie et de la reproduction des modèles importés, une créolité de la *doublure*" (115). "The creole text was meant to amuse, to be frivolous, to defend a conservative ideology, and above all rely on a prior French foundation. It was a *Créolité* comprised of the transposition of fables, poems, operettas, a literature of copying and reproduction of imported models, a *Créolité* of *doubleness*" (my translation). However, for writers of color such as Durand and Parepou in particular, Prudent suggests that the use of Creole language was more nuanced and potentially revolutionary, calling into question the traditional stylistics of French literature as well as racial and colonial identity: these works of Creole language literature "aborde également la question de l'identité créole, de l'authenticité indigène face aux comportements empruntés, mimétiques, et en definitive stériles. La créolité présente ici est faite de respect de la tradition, de recherche stylistique originale, de défense de la valeur intrinsèque de l'homme créole." (115-116). These works "take up both the question of creole identity and native authenticity against cultural norms that were borrowed, memetic, and definitively sterile. The *Créolité* present here demonstrates a respect for tradition, a search for original stylistics, and a defense of the intrinsic value of the creole man" (my translation). Concerning the extent to which Creole language was spoken amongst the range of racial groups and socioeconomic classes in the French Antilles in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Gratiant states that even though the elite primarily spoke French, "Toute la population martiniquaise comprenait le créole" (18); "the entire population of Martinique understood Creole" (my translation).

réservé à la plaisantrie, à l'intimité" (19).[49] The register of intimacy and informality provided by Creole language thus allows Houël access to a queer feminine erotic space in which gender becomes fluid. In addition to the gender shift that occurs within "Philtre d'amour," gender remains ambiguous and unstable in the other poems of this series. In "Que ou vle… Que ou pas vle ou Le Pont d'amour,"[50] a speaker whose gender is never specified flirtingly addresses a woman who proudly mimics the white elite. "Adieu bonheu' !"[51] is addressed to a feminine lover from a masculine perspective. "Chacun son tou"[52] erotically addresses a Biguine dancer, and while neither the addressee nor the speaker are specifically gendered, the Biguine (a Martinican folk dance with African origins) was associated with the feminized figure of the *doudou,* thus feminizing the addressee. This poem's language of religious sin also suggests that the lovers will later be required to repent at confessional and while reciting the *Miserere*, which implies a taboo, and thus potentially queer aspect to this love.[53] "Mieux sé vô mô"[54] is the most overtly heterosexual of the poems, describing the erotic fantasy a masculine lover recounts to a feminine partner. Yet this poem provides a darkly sadomasochistic view of sexuality in which the masculine speaker imagines being choked to death by his lover.[55] In presenting this erotic exchange, Houël furthermore eroticizes the history of racial violence in the French Antilles by imagining erotic murder with a "collier," a term that conveys an ambiguous set of connotations in French. While it could simply mean collar, "collier" is also the term for "necklace," thus

[49] "Creole was reserved for joking and intimacy."
[50] "Que tu le veuilles… Que tu ne le veuilles pas ou Le Pont d'amour / If you want it… If you don't want it Or The Bridge of Love"
[51] "Adieu bonheur ! / Goodbye Happiness!"
[52] "Chacun son tour / Each Has Their Turn."
[53] The *Miserere* is Psalm 50. Houël also quotes from the confessional prayer the *Confiteor*, "*c'est ma faute, ma très grande faute*" / "*through my fault, through my most grievous fault.*"
[54] "Plûtot mourir ! / Better to die!"
[55] The erotics of sadomasochism also has evident precedent in the French literary tradition with the writings of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1817).

feminizing the male lover being choked/adorned with traditionally feminine jewelry. The term "collier" could also be used with reference to the yoke or chains of slavery. This poem thus opens up an erotic space for controlling and subverting the history of violence projected onto enslaved bodies, in addition to reversing traditional gender roles as the male voice asks to be submitted to violent erotic bondage. The fantasy of erotic death in this poem furthermore invokes the volcano through the imagery of "ashes" to symbolize both the death of the speaker and the dissolution of the relationship.

A further reading of the poem "Que ou vle… Que ou pas vle ou Le Pont d'amour" suggests a playful deconstruction of the racial class structure through queer flirtation. While this love poem addressed to a woman does not contain a marker of the speaker's gender, as with Houël's other poems addressed to and about women, Houël's position as a female poet allows for a potential femininity of the poetic voice. When read directly, this poem may appear to uphold an elite white woman as the ideal of feminine beauty, however a close reading reveals the ambiguity of her racial and class status and the poem's playful tone suggests that her social aspiration provides a source of flirtatious mockery:

> Manzèle-là qui ka passé là, — ka senti bon con réséda, — qui li ni bel foula brodé — gran cossé con femmes « béké », di moin ti tac si cé tout ça — qui ka fai vous poté tête ou — con couleuvre qui ka passé d'lo ?
>
> Manzèle-là, chè, ou va bo fai — magré toute *flapp flapp* jupon vou — fiété ou pa ké duré guè : pié ou chaussé, rivié pas loin.
>
> Moin ja ka cueilli patchouly — pou moin froté assus co moin — pace que *ou vlé, que ou pas vlé* manzèle-là, chè, moin ka di vous : — cé deux bras moin, ou peu couè moin, — qui ka lé sévi ou pont — pou fai ou passé gro d'lo là.
>
> Hé ! la demoiselle qui passes là ! — qui embaumes le réséda, — portes un beau foulard brodé, — un grand corset comme les femmes « chic », — est-ce d'être si joliment parée — qui te rend donc tellement fière ?…
>
> Chère, malgré toutes tes manières, — ton dédain ne tiendra guère. — Va, tu as d'élégantes chaussures, — et la rivière ne coule pas loin.

> Déjà, je cueille le patchouli — et je m'en parfume le corps — car, que tu veuilles, ou ne veuilles pas, ce sont mes bras, belle demoiselle, — qui seuls te serviront de pont — pour traverser l'eau tumultueuse.
>
> *Madamoiselle* walking by, — perfumed with *reseda*, — wearing a beautifully embroidered headscarf — a large corset like the "chic" white women, tell me — is being so finely dressed — what makes you so proud?
> *Madamoiselle*, dear, in spite of your airs — your disdain will never hold — go ahead, in your elegant shoes: — the river doesn't run far.
> Already, I've picked the patchouli — to perfume my body — for, *whether you like it or not*, I tell you: — here are my arms, beautiful lady, — which alone serve as your bridge — for crossing the tumultuous water.

Houël's description of the woman as "chic" in the French version serves to obscure a complicated dynamic of racial and class relations specific to the Caribbean as the original Creole version instead uses the term "béké," commonly used to refer to the white creole class in the French Antilles. Houël's substitution of a racial term for one that only signifies social class suggests an obfuscation of the complexities of racial meaning for a French metropolitan audience. Rather than directly labelling this woman a *béké*, this term is used in simile with the comparative "like" ("con," "comme") and further put into question by Houël's use of *guillemets* (quotation marks) to encapsulate this term.[56] The description of the "beautiful lady" as "like a *béké*" thus suggests that she may not actually be white or elite but instead mimics this class in an act of social aspiration. An ironic, albeit flirtatious, mocking is further suggested by the speaker's address of this person as "manzèle" (mademoiselle), which Houël intensifies in the French version as "demoiselle," a more antiquated and formal term of address, juxtaposed with the use of the informal second person grammatical structure in French that implies familiarity and intimacy. The performance of mimicry, juxtaposition, and subversion of social roles finds cultural precedent in the celebration of Carnival, the celebration of which is heightened in the

[56] Houël maintains the guillemets with the substitution of "chic" in her French version as well.

Caribbean and culturally associated with this region.[57] While Houël does not directly label this woman's performance as a Carnival masquerade, this poem's mocking portrayal of the mimicry of whiteness, the fine dress of the *béké* further serving as a costume, works to critique her aspirational mimicry. The poem furthermore suggests that her disdainful attitude may be corrected by her acceptance of the queer erotic embrace of the "perfume[d] body" offered by the speaker: "here are my arms."

As I argue, Houël's poetics thus subvert and appropriate a *doudouist* aesthetics to queer the feminine exotic of early twentieth-century French Antillean poetics. Later condemnations of *doudouism* by French Antillean writers and intellectuals in the interwar period and by those associated with the *Négritude* movement were not specifically targeting Houël's writing. She does not seem to have had a lasting influence in French Antillean literary circles, perhaps due in part to her marginality as a woman in an already marginal colonial literature, as well as her lack of strong connections to other writers of the era, in Paris or in Martinique. These later critiques of *doudouism*, or a racialized and eroticized exoticism of Black and Antillean women, raise the question, however, of the political implications of the prevalence of associations between race, femininity, and the tropical landscape.

The "Plant-Man" and *Négritude*'s Re-Gendering of Nature

At the outset of the *Négritude* movement, writers, including women such as Suzanne Césaire and the Nardal sisters, began to heavily critique *doudouism* as anti-modern, reproducing racial stereotypes, and exoticizing women of color. In *Pantins Exotiques / Exotic Puppets*, Jane Nardal calls for an end of the representation of Blackness through the modes of exoticism and

[57] The theory of the carnivalesque as subverting social hierarchies comes from Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965).

association with nature, extending her critique to the modernist exoticism of the Harlem Renaissance and its arrival in Paris through the examples of Josephine Baker and Carl Van Vechten.[58] Nardal specifically evokes the responsibility of modernism to abandon this naturalized exoticism: "Aurions-nous le courage de nous dépouiller du prestige que nous confère la littérature exotique et de détonner, modernes, sur le décor passé, rococo des hamacs, palmiers, forêts vierges, etc."[59] While Nardal's critique of *doudouism* could come across as a conservative denunciation of eroticism and Black women's sexual expression (particularly her discomfort with Josephine Baker), Jacqueline Couti provides an important reminder that Nardal and her sisters were responding to the legacy of sexual violence enacted upon Black female bodies and forced oversexualization that rendered them vulnerable to this violence, which leads Couti to resituate the Nardal sisters within the history of Black feminism.[60]

In evaluating a Black feminist critique of *doudouism*, it is important to distinguish between the sexualized exoticized mode imposed by white male writers to render Black feminine bodies subject to colonial dominance and the "auto-exoticism" of Houël and other women writers of color who appropriate and subvert the exoticist tropes to find Black feminine agency in the expression of sexuality. An important counterpoint, which Couti also notes, is Audre

[58] Nardal's critique at Josephine Baker is more aimed at white Parisian audience's exoticist reception of her performance rather than at Baker herself. Carl Van Vechten was a white American modernist writer who was well integrated into the intellectual circles of the Harlem Renaissance, yet his primitivist exoticizing portrayal of Harlem's nightlife leaves a complicated legacy. Nardal's references to Anglophone, and especially African American literature and culture demonstrate the extent to which Nardal and her sisters were influenced by African American modernism and worked to engage in a transatlantic intellectual exchange. See also note 5.

[59] "Shall we have the courage to divest ourselves of the prestige the literature of exoticism confers upon us and, as modernists, to clash with the past, rococo decor of hammocks, palm trees, virgin forests, etc" (Translated by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Georges Van den Abbeele in *Negritude Women,* p. 108).

[60] "The painful history of abuse fostered within the plantation system explains why propriety and sexual restraint in a Black feminist context are not merely moralistic and traditionalist approaches. They concern the control of one's own body. Women of African descent in the Americas were not focused on claiming sexual freedom, but on the liberty to be free from of unwelcome sexual activity or objectification" (Couti 87). For more on the history of sexual violence against feminized Black bodies, see also my introduction for a discussion of Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* and also my discussion of the legacy of Saartje Bartman, "the Hottentot Venus," in Chapter 3.

Lorde's famous reclamation of the erotic as a source of power. Lorde writes, "The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation" (54). Lorde thus defines the erotic in opposition to the pornographic as an authentic expression of the self, a "depth of feeling" (54), rather than an external imposition aimed at reducing the self to an object, "the abuse of feeling" (59). Reading feminist critiques of *doudouism* from the onset of the *Négritude* movement thus allows for a reappraisal of the gendered representations of *Négritude* as not so much a rejection of the feminine erotic, but a continued exploration of relation to the tropical landscape.

Suzanne Césaire provides a complicated evaluation of *doudouism* in her writing published in *Tropiques*, on the one hand calling for literary representation to move beyond a simple exoticism, and on the other providing a complex Naturalist depiction of humans merging into vegetation to critique the repressive effects of colonialism. In *Misère d'une poésie : Jean Antoine Nau*,[61] Césaire echoes Nardal's critique of *doudouism* and exoticism:

> Allons, la vraie poésie est ailleurs. Loin des rimes, des complaintes, des alizés, des perroquets. Bambous, nous décrétons la mort de la littérature doudou. Et zut à l'hibiscus, à la frangipane, aux bougainvilliers.
> La poésie martiniquaise sera cannibale ou ne sera pas. (66)
>
> Come on now, real poetry lies elsewhere. Far from rhymes, laments, sea breezes, parrots. Stiff and stout bamboos changing direction, we declare the death of sappy, sentimental folkloric literature. And to hell with hibiscus, frangipani, and bougainvillea.
> Martinican poetry will be cannibal or it will not be. (27)[62]

[61] Jean Antoine Nau was a white *doudouist* writer. See also note 22. This essay was originally published in *Tropiques* no. 4, 1942.

[62] Translation by Kieth L. Walker. It is important to note that Césaire directly references "doudou literature," which Walker translates as "sappy, sentimental, folkloric literature," perhaps because literary *doudouism* is less familiar to Anglophone audiences. Notably, Suzanne Césaire's proclamation "La poésie martiniquaise sera cannibale ou ne sera pas" echoes the final line of André Breton's *Nadja* (1928),"la beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou ne sera pas," perhaps calling for a surrealist aesthetics to counter *doudouist* exoticism.

While arguing against an exoticized, docile, and feminized representation of the Antilles rooted in florid language, Césaire also uses imagery of the tropical landscape to elaborate her nuanced critique of colonialism. Characterizing Suzanne Césaire's writing as an "ecopoetics," Anny Dominique Curtius argues that Césaire engages in "a nature-centered discursive practice where the Caribbean landscape and weatherscape are astutely woven together with issues of colonial expansion, historical trauma, social injustice, and struggle for political agency in the Caribbean." (Cannibalizing 515) The political impetus of Césaire's writing, Curtius argues, thus consists in her reclamation of the landscape through a resistance to the ideology of possession that inheres in colonial *doudouism*.[63]

In a forceful break from *doudouism*, Césaire replaces the beautiful exotic flower-woman with a new gendered figure of *Négritude*: the proletarian "plant-man." Her essay *Malaise d'une civilisation (The Malaise of a Civilization)*[64] constructs the figure of the "plant-man" to illustrate the psychological effects of French colonialism in the Antilles and argue that an enforced vegetative state is the status of the colonized:

> Qu'est-ce que le Martiniquais ?
> – L'homme-plante.

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[63] According to Curtius, for Suzanne Césaire, "le paysage caribéen n'est pas source d'errance pastorale, mais témoin des traumatismes de la colonization, et noyau d'une emancipation poétique et politique" (Curtius *Tropiques* 142). "The Caribbean landscape is not a source of pastoral errancy, but witness to the trauma of colonization and the root for a political and poetic emancipation" (my translation). More broadly, in *The Tropical Aesthetics of Black Modernism*, Samantha Noël identifies an aesthetics of writing about the tropical landscape, which Noël argues carried a decolonial political force for Black diasporic writers. Noël defines this aesthetics as a strategic method used to disrupt the touristic gaze through which the Caribbean archipelago, for example, is viewed, given its potential for inducing agency and imagining new possibilities for one's natural surroundings. By eradicating reductive visual representations of Black Atlantic peoples and the land they inhabit, tropical aesthetics brings about a reclamation [of] humanity and dignity. Tropical aesthetics can also aid in the reimagining of the landscapes Black people live on with Black folk in mind, and via the marvelous real, it can actualize the connectedness these landscapes have with other lands that members of the Black Atlantic occupy" (18). Suzanne Césaire and other writers of the *Négritude* movement including her husband Aimée produce this tropical aesthetics in their critical reclamation of the Caribbean ecopoetic space. While traditional *doudouist* literature that imposes a colonizing gaze provided a violent and destructive aesthetics to rebel against, my argument is that a reading of *doudouist* aesthetics and the poeticization of the Caribbean landscape more broadly needs a more nuanced and contextualized reading that allows for the participation of a writer like Houël in a resistant tropical aesthetics.

[64] Originally published in *Tropiques* no. 5, 1942.

> Comme elle abandon au rythme de la vie universelle. Point d'effort pour dominer la nature. Médiocre agriculteur. Peut-être. Je ne dis pas qu'il fait pousser la plante ; je dis qu'il pousse, qu'il vit en plante. Son indolence ? celle du végétal. Ne dites pas « il est paresseux », dites « il végète », et vous serez doublement dans la vérité. Son mot préféré : « laissez porter ». Entendez qu'il se laisse porter par la vie, docile, léger, non appuyé, non-rebellé – amicalement, amoureusement. Opiniâtre d'ailleurs, comme seule la plante sait l'être. Indépendante (indépendance, autonomie de la plante). Abandon à soi, aux saisons, à la lune, au jour plus ou moins long. Cueillette. Et toujours et partout, dans les moindres représentations, primat de la plante, la plante piétinée mais vivace, morte mais renaissante, la plante libre, silencieuse et fière. (70-71)
>
> What is the Martinican?
> – A human plant.
> Like a plant, abandoned to the rhythm of universal life. No effort expended to dominate nature. Mediocre at farming. Perhaps. I'm not saying he makes the plant grow; I'm saying he grows, that he lives plantlike. His indolence? That of the vegetable kingdom. Don't say: "he's lazy," say: "he vegetates," and you will be doubly right. His favorite phrase: "let it flow." Meaning that he lets himself flow with, be carried by life, docile, light, not insistent, not a rebel—amicably, amorously. Obstinate besides, as only a plant knows how to be. Independent (the independence and autonomy of a plant). Surrender to self, to the seasons, to the moon, to the day, whether shorter or longer. The picking season. And always and everywhere, in the least of his representations, primacy of the plant, the plant that is trod upon but alive, dead but reborn, the free, silent and proud plant.[65]

While Césaire's depiction of the Martinican "plant-man"[66] could be read as a suggestion that the vegetal docility of the Antillean people makes them complicit in their colonization, Césaire interjects an alternative reading of vegetation as a potential mode of resistance. The "plant-man" thus becomes a paradoxically powerful figure of rebellion through passivity: "the plant that is trod upon but alive, dead but reborn, the free, silent and proud plant."[67] These terms suggest a

[65] Translated by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Georges Van den Abbeele in *Negritude Women* (131-2).
[66] Sharpley-Whiting and Van den Abbeele have chosen to translate Césaire's phrase "l'homme-plante" as "human plant," however it could also be translated as "plant-man." Césaire uses the gendered word for "man" rather than the gender-neutral "personne," specifying the masculinity of the Martinican psychological type she therorizes.
[67] The static immobility of the plant that is living but not acting anticipates Afropessimist theories of social death. Orlando Patterson defines social death as the state of absolute alienation from the social order enacted by slavery: "Because the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master, he became a social non-person. […] [Natal alienation] is achieved in a unique way in slavery: the definition of the slave, however recruited, as a socially dead person. Alienated from all "rights" or claims of birth, he ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order" (Patterson 5). While Césaire's "human plant" is not socially dead in the sense of the slave, it is

potential cultivation of an indirect cultural resistance that has not yet been realized through the refusal to accept psychological subordination, echoing her call for a "cannibalistic" Martinican literature that must take in, destroy, and regenerate in order to continue. Sylvia Wynter provides an analysis of colonial exploitation in the Caribbean through the model of the plantation, referring to Caribbean people as "planted":

> The Caribbean area is the classic plantation area since many of its units were 'planted' with people, not in order to form societies, but to carry on plantations whose aim was to produce single crops for the market. That is to say, the plantation-societies of the Caribbean came into being as adjunct to the product, to the single crop commodity – the sugar cane – which they produce. (95)

As Wynter explains, the Caribbean plantation economy, of course, originated in slavery, and continued through the exploitation of working-class Black and migrant indentured Asian laborers into the twentieth century. Wynter suggests, in terms similar to Césaire, the resistant potential of a refusal of the plantation model through the small-scale system of plotting, as "the planters gave the slaves plots of land," which became, "like the novel form in literature terms, the focus of resistance to the market system and market values" (99). Césaire's "plant-man" thus refuses to participate in the colonial capitalist plantation economy and enacts, in Wynter's terms, a "cultural guerilla resistance to the plantation system" (99).

Perhaps in demonstration of a (carnivorous) cannibalization of *doudouism*, Suzanne Césaire represents a sexualized version of the Antillean landscape that allows for resistant empowerment in the spectacularized particularity of the Antilles. Césaire's "human-plant" is

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suspended in vegetation due to the power structure of colonialism, which includes the legacy of slavery in the Antilles and the continued economic, juridic, and social subordination of the colony to the metropole. By metamorphizing the Martinican as a plant, Césaire ties him to the cultivation of crops, which was the primary labor of the enslaved in the Caribbean colonies and then the work of indentured laborers and the working class after the abolition of slavery. While there is no liberating, resistant, or redeeming aspect to the enforced state of social death in slavery, Césaire provides a nuanced account of limited potential for resistance in this vegetative state as the plant remains "alive," "reborn," and "free."

masculinized (referred to in the original French as a man and with the gendered pronoun "he" although *la plante* is grammatically feminine in French). Césaire therefore shifts the gendering of Antillean nature away from traditional feminization of the *doudouist* style, yet her characterization of masculinity through vegetal metaphors marks Martinican masculinity as docile, subordinate, feminized, and even queered through the inversion of its normative associations. In *Le grand camouflage (The Great Camouflage)*,[68] Césaire eroticizes the landscape of the Antilles without clearly gendering it:

> C'est ainsi que l'incendie de la Caraïbe souffle ses vapeurs silencieuses, aveuglantes pour les seules yeux qui savent voir et soudain se ternissent les bleus des mornes haïtiens, des baies martiniquaises, soudain pâlissent les rouges les plus éclatants, et le soleil n'est plus un cristal qui joue et si les places ont choisi les dentelles des parkinsonnisas comme éventails de luxe contre l'ardeur du ciel, si les fleurs ont su trouver juste les couleurs qui donnent le coup de foudre, si les fougères arborescentes ont sécrété pour leurs crosses de sucs dorés, enroulés comme un sexe, si mes Antilles sont si belles c'est qu'alors le grand jeu de cache-cache a réussi, c'est qu'il fait certes trop beau, ce jour-là, pour y voir. (94).
>
> So it is that the conflagration of the Caribbean puffs out its silent vapors, blinding for the only eyes able to see, and suddenly the blues of the Haitian bluffs grow dim, suddenly the most dazzling reds grow pale, and the sun is no longer a crystal that plays, and if the public places have chosen Jerusalem thorns as their deluxe fans against the heat of the sky, if the flowers have found the right colors to make one thunderstruck, if the tree ferns have secreted a golden sap from their crook, all coiled up like a sex organ, if my Antilles are so beautiful, then it's because the great game of hide-and-seek has succeeded, and certainly that day would be too enchanting for us to see.[69]

Césaire's depiction of the landscape spectacularizes the Caribbean as both a site of excess and absolute inaccessibility. The "conflagration," "silent vapors," "blinding," "dazzling," "enchanting" features are evocative of the volcano and represent the landscape as hostile to the human, making it resistant to colonization, but also unyielding to its inhabitants. Césaire's interjection of human sexuality into the natural features that are otherwise resistant to humanity,

[68] Originally published in *Tropiques* no. 13-14, 1995.
[69] Translated by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Georges Van den Abbeele in *Negritude Women* (140).

comparing the fern to "a sex organ" provides an alternative eroticization of the Antillean landscape to *doudousim*. Rather than the feminization of the flora made seductive for the colonial gaze, Césaire's landscape is non-gendered, erotically charged, but inaccessible.

Aimé Césaire's foundational work of *Négritude* poetry, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal / Notebook of a Return to the Native Land,* enacts a similar symbolics of a sexualized Antillean landscape, while also countering the exotic feminine eroticism of *doudousim*. For example, *Cahier* invokes vegetal genitalia as a signifier of the virility and splendor of the Antilles:

> terre grand sexe levé vers le soleil
> terre grand délire de la mentule de Dieu
> terre sauvage montée des resserres de la mer avec dans la bouche une touffe de cécropies
> terre dont je ne puis comparer la face houleuse qu'à la forêt vierge et folle que je souhaiterais pouvoir en guise de visage montrer aux yeux indéchiffreurs des hommes
> il me suffirait d'une gorgée de ton lait jiculi pour qu'un toi je découvre toujours à même distance de mirage – mille fois plus natale et dorée d'un soleil que n'entame nul prisme – la terre où tout est libre et fraternel, ma terre (Césaire 21-22)[70]

As with Suzanne Césaire's resistant landscape, *Cahier*'s depiction of sex between the earth and sky presents erotic excess as surpassing the human scale and evading the comprehension of people, concealed from the "yeux indéchiffreurs des hommes. / undeciphering eyes of men." This ungraspability of the land again marks the Caribbean as resistant to colonization. While Césaire initially masculinizes the landscape through his depiction of the sun's phallus ("mentule" / "mentula" is an obscure term for penis), he also feminizes it through reference to "lait" (milk) and by marking it as the location of birth, the "pays natal," literally meaning "natal country" or

[70] "earth great vulva raised to the sun / earth great delirium of God's mentula / savage earth arisen from the storerooms of the sea a clump of / Cecropia in your mouth / earth whose tempestuous face I can only compare to the virgin and / foolish forest which were it in my power I would show in guise / of a face to the undeciphering eyes of men / all I would need is a mouthful of jiculi milk to discover in you always / as distant as a mirage — a thousand times more native and made golden by a sun that no prism divides — the earth where everything is free and fraternal, my earth" (Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, p. 16). While Eshleman and Smith translate the term Cesaire uses, "sexe," for the earth's genitalia as "vulva," in French, this is a non-specific term for a sexual organ.

country of birth, an image of the earth as mother, linguistically reinforced by the feminine grammatical gendering of earth, "la terre," in French. Aimé Césaire's sexualized landscape pushes masculinity and femininity to archetypical extremes, while also returning the landscape to a gender neutrality or duality by reflecting both the feminine symbolism of the earth and the masculine symbolism of the sun. Césaire's representation, however, removes the idealized exoticism of the Antilles associated with *doudouism*, upholding *Négritude's* critique of an apolitical or colonialist poeticization of the landscape as a beautiful woman to be possessed.

The de-feminization of the landscape in the shift from *doudouism* to *Négritude* follows a shift in the political impulse of Francophone Caribbean literature away from a feminized stylistic towards a masculinist Black internationalism, both predominantly produced by male writers. In *Black Empire*, Michelle Stephens compellingly makes the argument that early twentieth century and modernist Black intellectual movements including *Négritude* followed an ideology of Black nationalism as oppositional to white supremacy and the European imperial state. Stephens argues that for Anglophone Caribbean writers, due to the influence of discourses on the nation that pervaded European and US politics following World War I, "Blackness, then, as much as any other racialized consciousness during this period, was an imaginary burdened by the national" (5).[71] Stephens' argument about the gendered dimensions of early twentieth-century Caribbean Black internationalism relies not just on the politics of nationalism, but also on the literary representation of masculine and feminine figures:

[71] As Stephens explains, discourses of the nation underlaid international Anglophone Caribbean Pan-Africanist movements of this time: "Their writings during their years in the United States immediately after World War I must be read through the lens of a particular set of questions: Were black colonial subjects in the West included in the new European nationalisms? If not, could they turn to Africa as an originary homeland? Or should they locate home and nationalism in American citizenship? These questions lay at the heart of their engagement with transnational frameworks of identity during this period, as they attempted to construct an oppositional form of black nationalism and political representation in an international imperial world that did not yet recognize black colonial subjects as national peoples" (3).

> for the male Caribbean intellectuals discussed here, these desires and longings for the state were captured in and embodied by powerfully gendered and sexualized metaphors—the vision of the sovereign state figured in the black male sovereign; the desire for home at a more affective level figured in the woman of color. (Stephens 13-14)

According to Stephens, the logic of Black internationalist narratives, while emphasizing the masculinist ideology of nationalism, also produced feminine figures of the autonomous Black nation: "female protagonists often come to represent a multinational and multiracial black world, one that could be seen as mirroring the hybridity of the world of empire, more so than representing separate and separatist racial ideologies" (57). Interestingly, according to Stephens' analysis, the feminine figure of Black nationalism accommodates the multiplicity and hybridity of transnationalism, occupying a similar discursive position to the *creole*. This demonstrates how idealized feminine figurations of fluidity, permeation of borders, and the intimate or private can be made to function ideologically in the service of masculinist ideals of racial, national, or other identity-based systems of belonging, possession, and exclusion.

Claire-Solange, the Creole Family Romance, and the Possibility of a Feminine *Négritude*

Suzanne Lacascade's only novel, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine* (Claire-Solange, African Soul) was published in 1924 in Paris.[72] Lacascade's biography was entirely unknown until her great-grand niece, Emmanuelle Gall provided a detailed introduction to the scholarly republication of *Claire-Solange* in 2019 in Roger Little's *Autrement Mêmes* series. Like Houël, Lacascade, also from the elite class of people of color, never married and settled permanently in Paris as an adult where she published her writing. Lacascade's childhood background, however, was quite different as, like her titular protagonist, she was the daughter of a French colonial

[72] There has not to my knowledge been a published English translation of *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*. All translations provided from this novel are my own.

administrator, although her father was biracial and from Guadeloupe.[73] Lacascade was born in Fort-de-France, Martinique in 1884. Her mother was from Martinique, which has likely contributed to Lacascade sometimes being classified as Martinican and sometimes Guadeloupean in the limited scholarship. Due to her dual heritage, Antillean would be a better descriptor. Like Claire-Solange's father Étienne, the career of Lacascade's father, Théodore Lacascade, as a French colonial administrator led to her family's extensive travel in the French colonies: they lived in Tahiti and Mayotte before moving to Paris. After settling in Paris, Lacascade worked with her sisters as a private teacher and seems to have abandoned a literary career in favor of a teaching career after the publication of *Claire-Solange*.[74]

Although Lacascade's protagonist Claire-Solange delivers a profoundly feminist and decolonial critique of French racism that anticipates the *Négritude* movement more than a decade prior to Césaire's *Cahier*, Lacascade's novel does not seem to have gained much critical attention at the time of its publication and was published on a very small scale with only thirty

[73] Gall describes Lacascade's social and racial class background in the following terms: "les origines et l'histoire familiale de Suzanne Lacascade sont représentatives de la classe dite des mulâtres antillais et la prédisposent, selon l'expression en usage à son époque, à une forte sensibilité aux « questions de race et de couleur »" (viii). "The origins and family history of Suzanne Lacascade are representative of the Antillean class called "mulattos" predisposed her, according to the expression used at the times, to a high sensibility to 'questions of race and color'" (my translation). Gall's description of this social class emphasized that while Antillean society was structured around a racial hierarchy of colorism, the class of light-skinned biracial people of color was in some cases, but not always conservative and conciliatory to the white elite. Gall's description of the politics of Lacascade's father, Théodore Lacascade reveals a similar complexity: "Homme de gauche, assimilationniste convaincu comme ses collègues républicains, il va contribuer à porter la parole coloniale dans les territoires les plus reculés du globe avant de finir sa vie en métropole, criblé de dettes" (viii-ix). "Leftist, assimilationist, convinced like his republican colleagues that he would contribute to bringing the colonial discourse to the most isolated territories of the globe before ending his life in the Metropole, riddled with debt" (my translation). While idealistic and assimilationist, Théodore Lacascade was also an advocate against racism in his career and seems to have himself experienced the failings of the French colonial ideology.

[74] Jacqueline Couti suggests that the importance of Lacascade's career teaching elite white French pupils was precisely the reason for her isolation from French Antillean literary circles based in Paris, such as the salon of the Nardal sisters or the group of *Négritude* writers around Césaire: "Due to her age, patrons, and lifestyle, she could not belong to the young radical French Antilleans who created *Légitime Défense* (1931) and *L'Étudiant Noir* (1935). Lacascade wrote *Claire-Solange* when she was 40, after having lived in Paris since her high school graduation (1904), to denounce the impact of novels on the French imaginary and the real world." As Couti points out, Lacascade's intellectual separation from the *Négritude* movement does not entail a lack of engagement with decolonial politics (her critique of French exoticist novels).

copies printed in Paris (Orlando 119). The scholarly recovery of Lacascade's novel is mainly owed to Maryse Condé's writing about Lacascade in her efforts to bring critical attention to French Antillean women's writing. Condé and the scholars who have followed her have dealt with the politics of *Claire-Solange, âme africain* as a problem compounded by the inability of knowing Lacascade's politics beyond her novel, especially prior to Gall's illuminating biography of Lacascade. On the one hand, Lacascade provides a forceful, poeticized evocation of an intersectional feminist critique as her heroine Claire-Solange asserts her identification with blackness and African heritage to challenge the racism of French society.[75] On the other hand, this critique is treated as a childish idealism while the protagonist is ultimately re-figured as a proper French subject, realigned with the white lineage of her father, while her Creole family disappears from the narrative.

Whether we read *Claire-Solange* as an idealized yet deeply flawed anti-colonial polemic that takes Africa as a mythicized, exoticized shadow in the formation of a French creole identity, or a novel of the re-formation of the racialized creole into the proper, whitened French subject hinges upon what genre we situate the novel in. Lacascade's novel produces multiple narrative forms: the colonial romance in which Claire-Solange's marriage to her French cousin and World War I veteran Jacques Danzel ushers her into a nationalist identification with France as the center of empire, and the modernist narrative that critically engages in exoticism while probing

[75] In her assessment of the important contribution made by Suzanne Lacascade's novel *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, Sharpley-Whiting credits her work as having an unrecognized feminist political impetus: "The masculinist genealogy constructed by the founding poets and shored up by literary historians, critics, and Africanist philosophers continues to elide and minimize the presence and contributions of French-speaking black women to Negritude's evolution. Among such neglected proto-Negritude writers is Suzanne Lacascade. In her first and only novel, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine* (1924), Lacascade offers this dedication: 'To my African ancestor mothers, to my Creole grandmothers.' It is a provocative one for the year in which the work was published. In 1924, there was not another black Antillean writer, male or female, who dared to write such a dedication, who dared to write such a novel" (Sharply-Whiting 14). Sharply-Whiting's assessment on the uniqueness of *Claire-Solange* for this time provides an important reassessment of the legacy of *Négritude* when giving credit to the intellectual contributions of Antillean women of color.

the psychology of racialization as a violent form of subject making. Gall defines *Claire-Solange* through the genre of the colonial novel (xiv). [76] Jennifer Anne Boittin, writing specifically about white women travel writers, provides a feminized formulation of “the genre of the colonial woman writer.” Boittin defines this genre as participating in a gendered aesthetics while also dealing with the political complexities of interracial relations, “a topic that required either facing a still-taboo interracial sexuality or extensive and often independent travel in regions considered dangerous and reserved for the male sphere of influence” (187). Boittin continues, explaining that this writing tended to incorporate other feminine genres, “such as the romance novel with personal experiences and a sense of the exotic” (187). While Lacascade inverts the geography of the colonial novel by confining the narrative of *Claire-Solange* to the French metropole, her novel is entirely structured through French colonialism in both Claire-Solange’s initial anti-colonial politics and the romance plot’s re-inscription Claire-Solange into a nationalist ideology. In my reading of *Claire-Solange*, I reframe the genre of the colonial novel as the colonial romance, drawing both on the novelistic genre of romance that incorporates travel and adventure and on *Claire-Solange*’s plot trajectory of courtship ending in marriage. As Boittin notes, the romance novel is a feminized genre, and Lacascade participates in a feminine stylistics of romance and exoticism, also associated with French Antillean *doudouism*. My re-framing of this genre as a colonial romance is also intended to invoke Françoise Vergès’ analysis of the colonial

[76] “À première vue, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine* réunit les ingrédients d’un genre en vogue dans l’entre-deux-guerres : le roman colonial” / “At a first glance, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine* assembles the ingredients of a genre that was in vogue in the interwar period: the colonial novel” (xiv). Gall continues in defining this genre through the exoticist gaze placed upon the colonies while noting that *Claire-Solange* doesn’t quite participate in this trope: “Si le voyage initiatique de Claire-Solange n’a rien d’exotique, chaque étape lui offre l’occasion d’évoquer – *a contrario* – les beautés et les richesses des colonies” (xv). “If the Claire-Solange’s initiatory voyage had noting exotic, each stage – *a contrario* – offers her the chance to evoke the beauty and riches of the colonies.” A classic example of the roman colonial / colonial novel would be French Antillean writer René Maran’s *Batouala* (1921), which was the first novel by a Black writer to win the Prix Goncourt. This novel drew from Maran’s experience in French Equatorial Africa as a colonial administrator.

family romance.[77] In terms of Lacascade's modernist aesthetics, Jennifer Wilks reads Lacascade's mixing of literary style as a gesture towards experimental modernism: "Lacascade's novel, rather than conforming to fixed literary models, instead slips between them, revealing their permeability, points of contention, and ultimately interdependence" (27). In taking *Claire-Solange* as a modernist production of indeterminacy and hybridized aesthetics, it is also important to note that Lacascade's initial evocation of newness hinges on the exploitable body of her protagonist through Jacques's seizing upon "la nouveauté d'une personnage : une mulâtresse" (17). Lacascade's novel presents a hybridized form, combining both the impulses for a modernist aesthetics and colonial romance, and thus presents an ambivalent politics that re-inscribes white, French, and bourgeoise supremacy, while also disrupting the ease of this process through continual gestures towards the ideal of an alternative relational possibility that cannot be realized.

Claire-Solange begins as a narrative of seduction and domination in which Claire-Solange's white French aunt, Madame Pol Huquart (also called Jeanne), offers her niece to her godson and Claire-Solange's cousin, Jacques Danzel, as a project of restoring the white French order by breaking Claire-Solange away from the lineage of her Martinican creole family (whose sway is represented through Claire-Solange's creole aunt Émilienne). Intertwined with a narrative of how the European climate killed Claire-Solange's Martinican mother, Aurore, "une fragile créole" / "a fragile creole" (14), and how her expatriate family has returned to France because "ces climats de sauvages ne conviennent plus à Étienne" / "those savage climates no longer suit Étienne" (17), Claire-Solange's white French father, is a struggle that Jeanne poses over the national identity and geographical allegiance, if not the soul, of the creole daughter: "sa

[77] See note 102.

fille, en somme, se trouve avoir l'âme plus qu'à demi-européenne... Si je pouvais la retenir près de moi... triompher d'Émilienne... Jacques, tu m'aideras ?..." / "his daughter, in sum, has found herself in possession of a soul that was more than half European… If only I could keep her close to me… defeat Émilienne … Jacques, would you help me?... (17).[78] Jacques' eventual proclamations of love for Claire-Solange are thus in fulfillment of the promise that the French empire will triumph over the improper colonial family led by Émilienne in a battle for the European half of Claire-Solange's soul. Jacques heeds both the national and familial call when "En parfait filleul, il promit, amusé par l'intrigue qu'il soupçonnait, et par la nouveauté du personnage : une mulâtresse" / "A perfect godson, he promised, amused by the intrigue that he anticipated, and by the novelty of her character: a mulatta" (17). The novelty of the biracial woman presents a diverting exoticism that produces the vision of Jacques already possessing Claire-Solange before her consent can be given. A reading of the colonial romance plot of Lacascade's novel thus cannot be separated from the narrative of seduction that precludes consent and engages in a project of reforming the "improper" creole family into one that will presumably reproduce whitened French national subjects. Even before Jacques's war injuries prevent him from leaving France, the narrative framing indicates that Claire-Solange's marriage to Jacques necessitates her repatriation and deracination, which makes this a categorical undoing

[78] The logic of a racialized system of climate incompatibility is necessary, from this perspective, to inscribe limits on the French family. Claire-Solange is offered conditional welcome into the white French family (along with her father) because she survives the European climate (being half white), while her creole mother (and by extension her creole family) must be violently excluded because due to her race and Martinican heritage, she cannot survive the whitened harshness of France. Maryse Condé identifies the importance of climate in Lacascade's novel and emphasizes how Claire-Solange's transmission of tropical warmth makes her a better partner to Jacques, offering an alternative to the frigidity of the European woman: "Suzanne Lacascade in her only novel, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, constructed a theory of climates in order to prove the superiority of the colored woman over the white one" (*Order, Disorder Freedom* 131).

of Étienne's marriage to Aurore that resulted in his ex-patriation and the birth of their biracial creole daughter.[79]

Before resolving the novel in a conservative turn to the colonial romance, Lacascade gives voice to a feminist decolonial and anti-racist politics through Claire-Solange's pointed critiques of the ideological position of her white French family. In her initial reeducation of her racist white family, Claire-Solange employs a discourse that asserts her subjectivity as a woman alongside a valorization of her blackness and African origins, critiquing both the history of French colonialism and slavery *and* patriarchal power structures in colonial societies:

> Je suis Africaine, clamait Claire-Solange, persuadée que cette déclaration intéressait l'univers... Africaine, par atavisme et malgré mon hérédité paternelle ! Africaine, comme celle de mes aïeules, dont nul ne sait le nom sauvage, et que la traite fit échouer esclave aux Antilles, la première de sa race [...] Mes grand'mères caraïbes, je les méprise, un peu ! Figuriez-vous, tante, que, après la naissance des enfants, c'est le père qui se couche, pour recevoir les visites de félicitations que la mère retourne à ses travaux d'esclave. (66-67)
>
> I am African, proclaimed Claire-Solange, persuaded that this declaration interested the universe. African, by atavism and in spite of my paternal heritage! African, like my ancestors, whose savage name no one knows, and who life washed ashore as slaves in the Antilles, the first of their race […] My Caribbean grandmothers, I despise them a bit! Try to imagine, aunt, that after the children are born, it's the father who lays down, to receive congratulatory visits while the mother returns to her labor as a slave.

This impassioned speech provides a validation of Blackness and African origins that anticipates the *Négritude* movement and casts an intersectional feminist critique of the ways that enslaved

[79] Couti reads Lacascade's ending of the marriage between Claire-Solange and Jacques as a more nuanced and veiled critique of colonialism that projects France as dependent on the power of the creole woman of color: "In other words, the relationship between Claire-Solange and her cousin incarnates the salvation of France by Antillean intervention. This political metaphor illustrates a reversal of power: France is a wounded man in dire need of a Black woman's tender touch; hence in the characterization of the weakened metropole we also find the emasculation and feminization of the country. This emasculation gives way to the vibrant, virile power of French Antilleans as protectors of the nation. This idea counteracts the topos of the feminine Antilles and demonstrates that Antillean men do not consider themselves to be subservient – as protectors of France, these men own their destinies" (115). While Couti's analysis provides a compelling suggestion of Lacascade's subversion of nationalist ideology, I still read the ending as a loss for Claire-Solange entailing both the silencing of her decolonial feminist political voice and isolation from her Martinican family as she is bound by Jacques to remain in France.

women were subjugated to gender-based bodily violence and dehumanization in being forced to return to labor shortly after giving birth while male slaves were allowed rest. This discourse furthermore makes the theoretical connection that the identity of the diasporic Black person is not separable from the foundational violence of slavery, which made it impossible to recover the "savage name no one knows." However, in other ways, Lacascade posits Claire-Solange's speech as a failed political discourse that cannot be sustained within the text or as a coherent decolonial feminist politics. Claire-Solange's rhetoric demonstrates her naive idealism, and the commentary of Claire-Solange's aunt Jeanne reframes her speech as childish. When Claire-Solange proclaims that her passion is "Défendre, glorifier la race noire. Et papa m'aide," Jeanne retorts "Ton père te gate" (66).[80] When Claire-Solange suggests, "…Si je renie mes aïeules blanches," Jeanne responds, "Ne va pas trop loin, ma fille," further infantilizing Claire-Solange by referring to her as a "girl" (67).[81] While Jeanne is cast as a racist and unsympathetic figure of the white French prejudice against creoles of color, Lacascade's narrative seems to offer Clarie-Solange's marriage to Jacques as a corrective to her previously radical views and side with Jeanne in the notion that this radicalism is childishly naïve, while still exposing Jeanne's racism. More troublingly, the extreme idealism of Claire-Solange's blame of her creole grandmothers for their own oppression makes this untenable as a feminist stance. Claire-Solange evokes the Antillean creole grandmother as a demeaned and silenced figure, much like the female servants that accompany her creole family. Through the devaluation of this figure, Lacascade's feminist critique fails because it relies upon perpetuating the silencing of the already marginal subject. The appeal to a mythicized Africa in order to redeem the problem of the Antillaise demonstrates

[80] "To defend and glorify the Black race. And Papa is helping me."; "Your dad is spoiling you." Notably, after this retort, Claire-Solange's father does rise to her defense.
[81] "… If I renounce my white foremothers…"; "Don't go too far, my girl."

a logic of equation in which as Claire-Solange generalizes about Africa, thereby participating in the exoticist and reductive mode of representation that veers into primitivism with the figure of the incomprehensible "savage."

The sense of linguistic incomprehensibility is taken up by Lacascade's inclusion of Creole language in her dialogue and the addition of Creole songs that she transcribes in sheet music and appends to the novel. While Lacascade's use of Creole language on the one hand accomplishes an Antillean identification, it also symbolically merges with her evocations of African language as untranslatable and conveying affective meaning without being understood. A notable example of African language in the text occurs when Claire-Solange sings a song she overheard from a boy in Zanzibar without knowing the meaning of the words. A footnote to the text further states that Lacascade herself had overheard this song but was never given a translation, and thus transmits the overheard language without the meaning into the text (43).[82] Lacascade's insistent inclusion of these untranslatable lyrics points to an effort to capture meaning through transcribed sound and affect while demonstrating a breakdown of the legibility of language, a profoundly modernist gesture. Brent Edwards states regarding the inclusion of untranslated language, both Creole (which Lacascade knew) and African languages (which she did not), "Lacascade transmits to the reader only something that *cannot* be transmitted as evidence in any disciplinary sense, as something that can appear only in this oblique layered space as fiction" (57). While Edwards reads the appended sheet music of Antillean songs as an ethnographic closing gesture, in my view, her insertion of this music while refusing a reading or interpretation also provides an ambiguous opening to an affective space where linguistic

[82] This song is not in Antillean creole, but an African language. A footnote states "L'auteur a entendu ces paroles dans des circonstances analogues à celles que relate Claire-Solange, mais personne n'a pu, ou n'a volu lui en donner le sens." (43) "The author overheard these lyrics in similar circumstances to those that Claire-Solange recounts, but no one was able to or wanted to give her the meaning.".

meaning remains inaccessible. While Antillean readers may understand Lacascade's Creole additions, a French metropolitan audience may struggle to interpret, making these textual moments of unfathomability analogous to Claire-Solange's transmission of the song she overheard in Zanzibar.

While Lacascade ultimately does echo the style of exoticism and primitivism, particularly in Claire-Solange's evocations of a de-localized and unknowable Africa, but also in the colonial romance narrative, the question of audience is critical to an evaluation of the novel. Based on its limited publication in Paris, it seems that *Claire-Solange* is addressed to a white French metropolitan audience, or possibly an audience of the colonial elite living in Paris, an audience that would have been sympathetic to the elite status of Lacascade's creole characters, which allows them to travel throughout the empire and ultimately reside in Paris, employ servants (barely mentioned) who accompany them on all their travels, and take part in the society of colonial administrators. It is for this reason that Condé argues that Lacascade's novel is not meant to suggest alternative structures of thought to creole and colonized readers, but rather gain the admiration of the whitened French elite (while perhaps nonthreateningly challenging some of their more blatant stereotypes):

> C'est donc l'Europe que Suzanne Lacascade entend persuader de sa valeur. C'est à son amour et à son respect qu'elle aspire. C'est du monde blanc qu'elle entend se faire accepter. *Comme différente.* Or, cette différence n'est que la prise de possession d'éléments ambigus venus en droite ligne du vieux fonds paternalo-raciste : chaleur, spontanéité, enivrante douceur, mystère de forêt vierge... C'est dire que Suzanne Lacascade se trompe en croyant détruire les stéréotypes et que sa recherche d'identité abouti à un piège. (*Littérature Féminine* 159)[83]

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[83] "It is therefore Europe that Suzanne Lacascade intends to persuade of her value. It is Europe's love and respect that she aspires to. It's the white world where she tries to gain acceptance. *As being different*. This difference is nothing more than the taking into posession the ambiguous elements coming in a straight line out of the old paternal-racist background: warmth, spontaneity, intoxicating sweetness, the mystery of the virgin forest… That is to say that Suzanne Lacascade deludes herself in believing that she is destroying the stereotypes and that her search for identity ends in a trap" (my translation).

The exoticized non-European, but pacified properties of the figural creole woman thus make her a subject of desire to be possessed by the metropole.[84] Condé's indication that this reproduction of exoticism leads to a trap presents an apt description of Lacascade's presentation of the status of marriage in the colonial context. Against the exoticized and glorified status of creole identity, the abrupt narrative stop as a result of Claire-Solange's marriage to Jacques Danzel, who cannot leave Europe, let alone France, presents a deflating end to Lacascade's highly stylized rhetoric of exoticism.[85]

At stake for Lacascade in the representational politics of *Claire-Solange* is the exoticism of the figure of the creole in the French literary tradition and an effort to revise this representation outside of racializing tropes. Jeanne first conveys her racist disdain for Claire-Solange's creole mother to Jacques through the stereotype of the creole woman in French literature, describing Aurore as "la créole des romans qui séduit tous les hommes et désarme les femmes," suggesting a slight homoeroticism through the implication that this figure seduces women along with men (15).[86] It is clear that Jacques' initial attraction to Claire-Solange transposes this same literary fantasy. While watching the creole family's servant Da Dunise style Claire-Solange's hair, Jacques evokes Baudelaire's "dame créole," thinking that Baudelaire

[84] Lacascade's capitulation to the potential fulfillment of the desires of a metropolitan and assimilationist audience through the marriage of Claire-Solange and Jacques, in a sense, makes her guilty of the shortcomings of which Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Rafaël Confiant accuse other earlier Caribbean authors: "une écriture pour l'Autre, une écriture empruntée, ancrée dans les valeurs françaises, ou en tout cas hors de cette terre [les Antilles], et qui, en dépit de certains aspects positifs, n'a fait qu'entretenir dans nos esprits la domination d'une ailleurs...."(14).[84] Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant subvert the literary style of exoticism in their analysis by reframing the exotic and idealized elsewhere/*ailleurs* as France, and yet while France is "l'Autre" (the Other), it still maintains a dominant position through the inability of the colonized subject to access by a means other than idealization and replication.

[85] Valérie Orlando, for example, reads the unsatisfactory nature of the novel's ending as suggesting that Lacascade "did not see any possibility of mutual racial harmony or hope of equality in a color-blind-world" (121). While Lacascade's politics cannot be transparently determined through a reading of her novel, the narrative produces a tension between the desire to conform to French convention and the deflation of these conventions through the bleak manner in which they are achieved.

[86] "The creole woman from novels who seduces all the men and disarms women."

“avait su voir, avait aimé la nonchalance de ces attitudes exotiques” (49).[87] Lacascide quotes the lines from Baudelaire’s poem “À une dame créole” (To a Creole Lady) from *Les Fleurs du Mal*: “La brune enchantresse /A, dans le col, des airs noblement maniérés” (49)[88]. As these lines demonstrate, the exoticized beauty of Baudelaire’s creole lady depends upon her imitation of the elite (“gracefully mannered airs”), as much as her association with the exoticized locale of the colonial island.[89] Although Baudelaire wrote this poem about a white woman, the description of her as a “brown enchantress” reflects the ways in which the figure of the creole was already racialized as non-white, regardless of racial heritage or skin color. In the revelatory final lines, which Lacascade does not include, Baudelaire depicts the creole woman as a figure of both erotic domination and racial violence: “Vous feriez, à l’abri des ombreuses retraites / Germer mille sonnets dans le coeur des poètes, / que vos grands yeux rendraient plus soumis que vos noirs.”[90] As the creole lady becomes the muse of the enamored enraptured poets (hence the figure of the seductress), Baudelaire extends this to a violent image of her compelling the submission and subordination of the Black enslaved. In filtering this reference to Baudelaire through Jacques’ desiring gaze upon Claire-Solange, Lacascade omits the reference to slavery, which suggests that the figuration of the creole woman, is in fact founded upon the history of slavery and inseparable from this violence. Not understanding this, Jacques perpetuates the exotic erotic construction of the creole from French literature, which is precisely what Claire-Solange will later condemn as providing fuel for her aunt Jeanne’s racist stereotypes. As this exoticist fantasy seems to be the

[87] Baudelaire “had known how to see, had loved the nonchalance of these exotic attitudes.”
[88] “this brown enchantress / Has gracefully mannered airs in her neck” (translation by Geoffry Wagner)
[89] Baudelaire wrote “À une dame créole” about a white creole woman from Mauritius whom he met in Réunion.
[90] “In some shady and secluded refuge, you would awake / A thousand sonnets in the hearts of poets, / Whom your great eyes would make more subject than your Blacks” (translation by Geoffry Wagner). Others have translated “noirs” as slaves, which is the implication of Baudelaire’s poem, but a less direct translation.

driving force of Jacques' desire for Claire Solange, the implications of their marriage become quite troubling, undermining the supposed happiness of this ending.

Lacascade uses Claire-Solange's critique of her French family's racism to denounce the exoticist representation of the creole woman in French literature. While never mentioning any of the *doudouist* literature from the Antilles, this literary style could be assumed to be encompassed in Lacascade's thesis. After Claire-Solange's impassioned speech on racial politics, she accurately diagnoses the problem of exoticist representation in the problem of her aunt's racist attitudes towards her and her Martinican family. Claire-Solange tells Jeanne, "vous n'aviez jamais fait d'études sur le vif avant de nous connaître, et vous vous représentez les créoles d'après la littérature. Oui, je vois ça, les fadaises de Virginie, les langueurs d'Indiana… Surtout d'après les débordements sensuels racontés par…" (67).[91] Claire-Solange's father interrupts her at this point, cutting off the name that would complete her sentence, perhaps to suppress her evocation of sexuality, but it is possible that she would have attributed these sexual excesses to Baudelaire, cited earlier, who was known for the eroticism of his verse. Perhaps writing against the *doudou*, Lacascade never evokes sexual desire on the part of Claire-Solange, and in fact the only eroticism present in her prose is the fantasy of the sensual creole that Jacques catches from reading Baudelaire and the other French literary classics. Lacascade thus demonstrates that this trope was always a construct of French colonialist ideology. Jennifer Wilks supports this point, arguing that Lacascade's exoticism resists disempowering the woman of color through her

[91] "You've never studied the living model before knowing us, and you imagine the creole for yourself based on literature. Yes, I've noticed this, Virginie's babbling, Indiana's languishing… Especially after the sensual excesses recounted by…" The literary references here are to the novels *Paul et Virginie* by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1788) and *Indiana* by Georges Sand (1832). *Paul et Virginie* is a romance novel set in Mauritius, which was at the time a French colony. *Indiana* features a protagonist of the same name who is from Réunion. Interestingly, these literary references from the French canon (as well as Baudelaire's "À une Dame créole") all figure the white creole woman from islands in the Indian Ocean (Mauritius and Réunion) as opposed to the Caribbean. While Lacascade collapses this geography, her literary references demonstrate that in the French imaginary one colonial site can stand for another, and so the trope of the exotic creole is detached from a particular locatedness.

objectification by the colonizer because Claire-Solange identifies and resists this exoticist gaze: "As Claire-Solange speaks to her metropolitan audience, she is also speaking against the disjunction between reality and representation in exoticist rhetoric" (52). While Lacascade refutes the exoticist *doudouist* representation of a creole feminine, the lack of mutual erotic desire makes Claire-Solange's marriage to Jacques all the more unsettling, suggesting the creole woman's compliance and containment rather than erotic autonomy.

In presenting a definition of the term *créole* to Jacques, Claire-Solange substitutes the floral imagery of *doudouism* for an alternative naturalist lexicon: the breeding and consumption of livestock. When Jacques asks her about the distinction of racial categories, Claire-Solange associates "creole" with racial mixing through the etymological analogy of "mulatto" and "mule":

> Comme Danzel, poli, demande le sens précis de ces distinctions, Claire-Solange prend la parole :
> — *Créole* : né aux colonies, exemple : bœuf créole, cheval créole, liriez-vous dans un dictionnaire. *Mulâtre* vient de mulet, veut dire : incapable de créer une famille. Les blancs aiment à nous donner ce nom et nous l'acceptons en riant, — moi du moins, — comme une preuve de leur suffisance. Ils se réserve le mot *créole* tout comme à des bœufs.. Vous qui venez de dénombrer en partie la descendance de mes grands parents mulâtres, …appréciez-vous l'ironie de … (35-6)
>
> Because Danzel politely inquired about the precise meaning of these distinctions, Claire-Solange spoke up:
> — *Créole*: born in the colonies, example: creole beef, creole horse, go read it in a dictionary. *Mulâtre [Mulatto]* comes from mule, means: incapable of creating a family. The whites love giving us that name, and we accept it while laughing, — at least I do, — as proof of their self-importance. They reserve the word *créole* for themselves, just like for the beef cattle.. Having just partially listed the descendants of my mulatto grandparents, you must appreciate the irony of …

Perhaps writing in a similar mode to Suzanne Césaire's agrarian vegetal metaphors for Antillean society, Lacascade compares Antillean racial categories to animal breeds, imparting an animalistic aspect upon both white colonials and Antilleans of color, with "boeuf creole"

potentially meaning both an Antillean breed of cattle and the dish of beef with creole seasoning. This animalistic comparison of humans to livestock thus further reduces people to food with a slightly cannibalistic undertone, ironic as this is applied to the white colonial elite who themselves perpetuated the primitivist fantasy of the indigenous cannibal.[92] While making a joke about the reproductive proficiency of interracial couples (which is interrupted by Jeanne), Claire-Solange also challenges cultural taboos around miscegenation that uphold French white supremacy. Rather than the idyllic exoticism of flowers and beautiful, sexually available women, this figuring of the creole is invested with a naturalist psychological symbolism of consumption of the other and humans reduced to animalistic breeding.

Lacascade, however, does not entirely resist the exoticist *doudouist* representation that she critiques. While not eroticized, the creole family's maid Da Dunise presents an alternative trope of the *doudou* as the loyal Black servant, denied interiority or individuality and subservient to her light-skinned bourgeois employers. The appellation "Da" literally means "nanny" in Creole, reducing Da Dunise to this role.[93] While her inclusion in the narrative is marginal, it demonstrates that Lacascade's critique of the representation of the creole woman was limited to the internationalist bourgeoisie and unconcerned with the lower-class colonial subjects who could not gain a privileged French whitening. Da Dunise, however, is not entirely silenced in the novel. She speaks in Creole, which both linguistically isolates her from the metropolitan French and contains her as a figure of Antillean exoticist regionalism, but also allows her more liberty in voicing a resistant discourse. Da Dunise, for example, interrupts a conversation between Claire-

[92] Unsubstantiated colonialist accounts, originating from Columbus, have represented the indigenous Carib people in particular as engaging in cannibalism.
[93] See Richard Burton for a more in-depth overview of the paired tropes of the "Da" and the "Doudou."

Solange and Jacques expressing her disapproval, which prompts Claire-Solange to inappropriately express herself in Creole:

> Inopportune interruption : digne et vexée, brandissant un carré de mousseline blanche, Da Dunise se teint sur le seuil, un foulard en *balata* autour du cou. Claire-Solange ne saisit plus le sens de cette provocante blancheur qu'agite la main noire, ridée, aux tendons saillants : il flotte tant de visions entre elle et la réalité… La servante fronce les lèvres et les avance résolument, signe de colère, elle daigne s'apaiser quand sa maîtresse s'approche et la caresse :
> — *Pas fais guiolle kiou poule, da chè… Oh !*
> Monsieur Danzel, je ne me risque pas à traduire… Le créole en ces mots brave l'honnêteté… (47)
>
> An inopportune interruption: dignified and vexed, brandishing a square of white muslin, Da Dunise stood at the threshold, a *batala* scarf around her neck. Claire-Solange could no longer perceive the meaning of that provoking whiteness billowing around the black, wrinkled hand with protruding tendons: many visions floated between her and reality… The servant pursed her lips and resolutely jutted them, a sign of anger, she grudgingly relented when her mistress soothingly approached:
> — *Pas fais guiolle kiou poule, da chè… Oh !*
> Monsieur Danze, I won't risk myself in translating… the Creole in those words is defiantly direct.

While Claire-Solange refuses to provide a translation of the Creole spoken in this exchange, Emmanuelle Gall's glossary helpfully provides the meaning in Standard French: "ne pas fais une tête en cul de poule, ma chère da" (148), meaning "don't make your face into a hen's ass, my dear da."[94] While Da Dunise's interruption is to call Claire-Solange for her hairstyling, her anger seems to be directed at Claire-Solange's intimacy with her white cousin. Lacascade conveys this scene through a psychological aesthetics in which the white fabric of Da Dunise's scarf against the Blackness of her skin provides a visually evocative and symbolic interruption of Claire-Solange's reality. Although Claire-Solange is awake, this image seems to take on the psychoanalytic significance of a dream, conveying a sense of racial mixing that upsets Da, or

[94] In French, the colorful expression "bouche en cul de poule" ("mouth like a hen's ass") means pursing one's lips as Da Dunise does in this scene.

conversely, a stark distinction between Black and white, implying an essential incongruence, revelatory for a novel of which the title poses an essential problem of the racial or cultural essence of the soul. Da later warns Claire-Solange about the developing intimacy between her and Jacques, speaking in Creole, "*A force tit fille la pressée pour descendre parler epi becqué-a. Un jour ou l'aut'i kaï marier li*" (76),[95] which roughly translates as "Watch it, if you go on like that, dear child, hurrying to go talk with that *becqué*. One day or another you might marry him."[96] That Da Dunise is aware of the narrative of the colonial romance that compels Claire-Solange's eventual marriage to the white man, a figure of the French nation, that she attempts to warn Clarie-Solange about this and demonstrates a clear anger and disapproval, produces a resistant counter-discourse within the novel that, while not having the power to alter the narrative, does provide a sense of symbolic disruption.

In a narrative shift in the second half of the novel, the potentially feminist, anti-racist rhetoric of Claire-Solange is suddenly subsumed by the masculinist nationalist and pro-empire rhetoric of militarism, as Claire-Solange seeks a rewriting of herself as a proper French subject for whom race and femininity are both diverted into a valorization of France's involvement in World War I. This narrative move chillingly demonstrates the ease in which the self-assertion of the feminized and racialized subject, can, on a rhetorical level, be reincorporated into the nationalism of the state. Lacascade stages the violence that the war enacts upon the bodies of the colonized who are called upon to sacrifice themselves for the French military: "Le Nord est menacé. Les Sénégalais sont en première ligne : chair de noir, chair à canon, choisie pour les prémices de l'holocauste, quel titre de gloire… Claire-Solange le sait et s'enorgueillit ? Non, elle

[95] Lacascade also does not translate this phrase, however the meaning in this case can be discerned by speakers of Standard French.

[96] *Becqué*, more commonly written as *béké*, is the Creole term for a white person. See also my earlier discussion of this term in Houël's poem "Que ou vle… Que ou pas vle ou Le Pont d'amour."

s'humilie de ne rien faire pour la guerre !" (166)[97]. The narrative voice seems to rhetorically intervene in this moment, as the evocation of "Black flesh, cannon fodder, chosen for the first holocaust, what a glorious role..." reads more as an ironic critique of the French empire's treatment of the disposable bodies of Black soldiers from the colonies as mere flesh to feed the cannons. Yet the narrative elides "The Scramble for Africa" and intensification of European colonialism that ensues from WWI and situates Claire-Solange firmly in service of nationalist and imperialist rhetoric, like the Black soldiers, symbolically sacrificing her flesh to uphold the white imperial nation. The final chapters portray her effort to overcome the humiliation of being circumscribed from the war effort due to her race and gender by reinvesting her subjectivity in the ideal of France and seeking a union with Jacques as the figure of French military victory.[98]

This narrative structure resulting in Claire-Solange's marriage to Jacques alongside her validation of French militarism and the sacrifice of colonized bodies has perhaps contributed to Lacascade's absence from a canon of French Antillean literature. In his critique of Mayotte Capécia's *Je Suis Martiniquaise*, which he extends to *Claire-Solange*, Fanon posits interracial relationships (between women of color and white men specifically) as a form of psychological colonial domination. Fanon takes particular aim at colonized women of color who desire white

[97] "The North is under threat. The Senegalese are on the front line: Black flesh, canon fodder, chosen for the first holocaust, what a glorious role… Did Claire-Solange know this and swell with pride? No, she felt humiliated that she did nothing for the war!"

[98] Wilks reads Claire-Solange's return to Jacques as a domestication and neutralization of him as a figure of the French empire: "Lacascade reflects this shift in colony-metropole relations by shifting the traditional balance of power in the white Frenchman-woman of color relationship. Jacques returns from combat with a maimed left hand and eye and, as Charlotte Bronte's Rochester before him, marries his beloved only after his male bravado and physical power have been neutralized. If we return to Lacascade's inversion of exoticist models (that is, the white Frenchman's identity can be collapsed into that of the metropole just as the woman of color's identity can be collapsed into that of her island), it might very well be Jacques-as-France whom Claire-Solange marries, thus proving herself the statutory equal to her mate" (Wilks 54) Yet Claire-Solange's return of the gift exceeds even the alignment of herself as the Martinican counterpart to "Jacques-as-France," for Lacascade suggests her offer is "l'amour unique d'une Africaine" (220). I am not as optimistic about the equality of the status of the figural representation of Martinique and France, for at the end of the novel, the Martinican remains a subject of the French empire who must perform her loyalty as a sacrifice to uphold the political power of France in the war.

men: “Nous sommes avertis, c’est vers la lactification que tend Mayotte. Car enfin il faut blanchir la race ; cela, toutes les Martiniquaises le savent, le disent, le répètent” (38)[99]. Fanon pathologizes Black women, claiming “C’est parce que la négresse se sent inférieure qu’elle aspire à se faire admettre dans le monde blanc.” (48).[100] By doing so, Fanon derides the sexuality of Black women and makes the error of exoticism, portraying the woman of color as continuously sexually available to the white European man, precluding her consent. Fanon’s use of the metaphor of “lactification” for assimilation into whiteness explicitly targets women, maternity, and femininity, evoking women’s production of breast milk. Fanon’s phrasing thus implies an embodied culpability of Black femininity in the biopolitical (re)production of whitened bodies and the hegemonic colonial social order. A critique of Lacascade’s colonial romance that forecloses any alternative to a marriage to Jacques must be accompanied by a recognition of the destructive logic of racism and colonialism, which places an impossible bind upon women of color in order to avoid the sexual violence that accompanies a representation of their sexuality as such. Condé counters Fanon’s analysis, arguing that Capécia’s novel presents “the mentality of a West Indian girl in those days, of the impossibility for her to build up an aesthetics which would enable her to come to terms with the color of her skin” (*Order, Disorder, Freedom* 131). The lack of alternatives in *Claire-Solange* demonstrates that a narrative structure that asserts creole racial identity without the need for a white masculinist appeasement does not, and perhaps cannot, emerge within the narrative imaginary. This demonstration of the lack of alternatives is, however, a political act in itself that indicates the impossibility of surpassing the

[99] “We are thus put on notice that what Mayotte wants is a kind of lactification. For, in a word, the race must be whitened; every woman in Martinique knows this, says it, repeats it.” (47)
[100] “It is because the Negress feels inferior that she aspires to win admittance into the white world.” (60)

colonial logic that casts the incorporation of the colonial subject into the French family as the desirable narrative outcome at that particular moment.

The colonial romance results in a deflated ending of Claire-Solange's entrapment in Europe with a white man who lacks any individuating characteristics. It also stands in for French nationalism and leads to a dream of an elsewhere that still refracts the paucity of marriage in comparison to the idealized, stylized rhetoric of Claire Solange's feminist anti-colonial discourse at the novel's outset. It is my contention that Lacascade's novel does not represent marriage to the empire as a positive choice or the "happy ending" that it seems.[101] Françoise Vergès' analysis of the societal unconsciousness of the colonized that produces the logic of the family romance demonstrates how France can represent the ideal hetero-patriarch desired by the colonial subject: "In the colonial relation, however, it was a fiction created by the *colonial power* that substituted a set of imaginary parents, La Mère-Patrie [Mother-Fatherland] and her children the colonized, for the real parents of the colonized, who were slaves, colonists, and indentured workers" (Vergès 3).[102] In the case of *Claire-Solange* it is not only the benevolent paternity of Étienne as

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[101] Gall also describes Lacascade's ending in these deflating terms: "Lorsque la guerre éclate, la jeune femme manifeste un patriotisme inattendu et croissant, à l'image de ses sentiments pour Jacques. Le politique se heurte au psychologique, et ce dernier l'emporte. L'héroïne restera en France, pour mener une vie bourgeoise auprès d'un mutilé de guerre. Le roman engagé se transforme en roman d'amour dépourvu de *happy end*. Ni pamphlet anti-impérialiste, ni roman coloniale, le projet littéraire de Suzanne Lacascade – et ses véritables revendications – sont ailleurs" (xvii). "Once the war breaks out, the young woman manifests an unexpected and patriotism that increases in measure with her feelings for Jacques. The heroine remains in France to lead a bourgeoise life at the side of a mutilated veteran. The activist novel transforms into a romance novel devoid of a *happy end*. Neither anti-imperialist pamphlet, nor colonial novel, Suzanne Lacascade's literary ambitions – and her true convictions – lie elsewhere" (my translation).

[102] Vergès takes the term "family romance" from Freud and cites Lynn Hunt's argument that the political unconscious attributes the relationship structure of the family to the nation in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. She also revises Richard Burton's concept of the Mère-Patrie, which Burton defines in the context of the Antilles prior to their 1946 incorporation into the French state through departmentalization: "Entre la Grande Révolution de 1789 et la départementalisation en 1946, la France – et surtout la France *républicaine* – est vécue aux Antilles comme une présence ou une force simultanément féminine et masculine, maternelle et paternelle (le premier terme l'emportant largement pourtant sur le second), présence ou force devant lesquelles l'Antillais se trouve en posture d'enfant à la fois reconnaissant et brailleur : reconnaissant de ce qu'il a déjà reçue des mains de la Mère-Patrie républicaine (et surtout de sa libération de l'esclavage de 1848) mais solliciteur d'un bien plus grand encore de la liberté, à savoir l'assimilation à part entière, grâce à la départementalisation, à la Mère-Patrie elle-même." (Burton 13-14). "Between the Great Revolution of 1789 and departmentalization in 1946, France, and

the liberal white colonial administrator and sole parent (La Mère-Patrie) who is valorized, but also Jacques who presents a return to the logic of the white father and improves upon Étienne by remaining in France and presumably producing white French children. As Vergès' analysis demonstrates, and the extreme lack of alternatives in *Claire-Solange* suggests, however, the maintenance of this narrative in which France becomes both mother and father, supplanting Claire-Solange's deceased creole mother Aurore, is compulsory. Aurore's family who travels with Claire-Solange to France, the *smalah*[103] that Jeanne continuously derides, represents an alternate family structure that is not centered around an insular upholding of the Mère-Patrie, but

especially *republican* France – was experienced in the Antilles as a presence or force that was simultaneously feminine and masculine, maternal and paternal (the first term however depending largely on the second), a presence or force against which the Antillean people found themselves in the position of the child, both grateful and whiny: grateful for that which they had already received at the hands of the republican "Mère-Patrie" (especially her liberation from slavery in 1848) but soliciting an even greater gift of liberty, as an absolute assimilation into the Mère-Patrie itself, as departmentalization was understood to be" (my translation). While Burton conceptual framing is colonialist and ludicrously imagines the colonized to be "grateful" for liberation from slavery by those who had enslaved them, his framing of the French colonial order as both a maternal and paternal presence provides useful ground for a decolonial feminist theoretical critique by Vergès and others. In an analysis of the representation of *métissage* (miscegenation) in Francophone contexts, Chantal Maignan-Claverie imagines the originary parental figures as an interracial couple produced from colonization, presenting a revision to Vergès and Burton's "Mère-Patrie" in which the governing paternalistic values of colonialism are enacted upon the colonized (and feminized) through sexual assault: "Dans l'ordre symbolique et fantasmatique, le Métis renvoie donc au couple primordial des sociétés marquées par la colonisation : le père blanc porteur des valeurs civilisatrices et la mère de couleur objet du désir. Mais, si du point de vue du colon, le métissage est le signe d'une transgression sexuelle, pour le colonisé il signifie la subjugation ou le viol. L'union interraciale comme scène initiale instaure donc paradoxalement le monde de la rupture qui est aussi le moment sacré où les conventions morales s'annulent." (Maignan-Claverie 19) / "In the symbolic and phantasmic order, the *Métis* returns to the primordial couple of societies marked by colonization: the white father bearing civilizing values and the mother of color object of desire. But if, from the point of view of the colonizer, *métissage* is the sign of sexual transgression, for the colonized it signifies subjugation or rape. The interracial union as an original scene therefore paradoxically instantiates the world of rupture that is also the sacred moment in which moral conventions are nullified" (my translation). For more on Vergès theory of the position of the (masculine) *métis*, see my discussion of her essay "Métissage, discours masculine et déni de la mère," published in Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage's edited volume *Penser la créolité*, in my introduction.

[103] As defined by the *Trésor du Langue Française, "*[Au Maghreb, et en particulier en Algérie] Ensemble des tentes d'un chef arabe, avec sa famille, ses serviteurs, ses soldats, ses richesses, son mobilier, ses troupeaux"([in Maghreb, and in particular in Algeria] an ensemble of tents of an Arab chief, with his family, his servants, his soldiers, his riches, his furnishings, his herds), and "Famille, suite nombreuse qui entoure, accompagne quelqu'un" (Family, numerous entourage accompanying someone). Lacascade's use of this term follows the narrative's Pan-Africanist decolonial impulses through its North African associations, while also being potentially exoticizing and inaccurate as an Algerian term. Lacascade's choice here does, however, serve to oppose the white French heteropatriarchal family structure with that of an alternative possibility of relationality of recognizing a larger transnational extended family. Although this term seems to impart a patriarchal connotation, upholding the power of a (presumably) male chief, Lacascade's use of it is primarily matriarchal with Émilienne as the head of Claire-Solange's maternal extended family.

rather around a broader female-centered network of kinship and support headed by Émilienne, who is unmarried, and seemingly almost entirely comprised of aunts and female cousins. Yet, according to the narrative logic of nationalism and climate, this matriarchal family cannot remain in Paris, and must be supplanted by the white French relatives.[104] At the outset, in response to one of her creole relatives teasingly hinting that her French cousin is a marriage prospect, Claire-Solange initially avows "jamais je n'épouserai un blanc, *jamais pas, jamais pas*" (28).[105] The narrative however, presents no other alternative, encoding Jacques as the only suitor from the beginning and presenting an enclosed French and colonial society where Claire-Solange has no social contact beyond her extended family. Jacques' status as Claire-Solange's cousin, already instantiated within the white French family, works furthermore to ensure the continuation of the family line. Vergès argues that the promise of the continuation of the Mère-Patrie can be construed as a "gift" (*don*) to the colonized that demands dependence in return:

> The colonial family romance produced two *fixed* categories, the giving colonizers and the receiving colonized. Studying its idiom means distinguishing between what was given and what was not given, how the *don* of France was transformed and reinterpreted by the colonial romance. [...] the *don* of France was presented as a selfless, generous gesture, a pure *don*, and yet there was a sentiment among the colonized that they were neglected *and* in constant debt. (Vergès 7) [106]

When considering the compulsory "gift" of France as the parent alongside Sara Ahmed's theorization of the "gift" of compulsory heterosexuality, it seems that for Claire-Solange, the mandate of the colonial family romance works in concert with the mandate of heterosexuality

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[104] The intrusion of World War I precipitates the erasure of the creole family from the narrative, for Jeanne's maintenance of the proper family through correspondence with Jacques, her soldier godson, elides Émilienne's presence in the family: "Émilienne s'efface de plus en plus devant le prestige dramatique de Madame Pol que se traîne, effondrée, de son secrétaire à la boîte aux lettres" / "Émilienne erased herself more and more in front of the dramatic prestige of Madame Pol, who went about, collapsing, between her writing desk and mail box" (Lacascade 178).

[105] "I will never marry a white man, *never, never.*"

[106] The concept of the *don*/gift comes from the structuralist anthropologist Marcel Mauss.

that requires the return of familial reproduction. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed argues that the "gift" is structured through the affective investments of the wedding gifts that remain in the family home as symbols of the desirability of marriage that produces a future for the family line: "the family home puts objects on display that measure sociality in terms of the heterosexual gift. [...] Such objects do not simply record or transmit a life; they demand a return" (Ahmed 90). The return mandated by heterosexuality is thus manifested in Lacascade's narrative shift into the colonial family romance. For Claire-Solange, this obligatory return is the production of whitened children who will inscribe her status as a proper French subject by being such themselves.

While rejecting the florid *doudou*, Lacascade returns to a primitivist Naturalist aesthetics in the final paragraphs that compellingly frame the narrative as psychological modernism and nascent surrealism.[107] Lacascade provides an evocative de-localized tropical or Africanist domestic scene in the mode of literary primitivism, beginning with the suggestion of a dream, "Transplantée désormais, en terre d'Europe, Claire-Solange, souvent, rêve" (221). "Albeit transplanted in the land of Europe, Claire-Solange often dreams." The dream that unfolds provides a primitivist deflation of the married couple:

> Dans une case au toit de paille se tiennent deux nègres, un homme et une femme. [...] La femme élève et laisse retomber, en une cadence immuable, un lourd pilon sur des graines de sésame dont elle doit faire, tout à l'heure, la sauce quotidienne. L'homme grogne ; la femme cesse son travail et lui passe une noix de kola, à la coquille rosée, qu'il se met à chiquer. [...] A l'intérieur de la case, on n'entend que le niam-niam des mâchoires, le

[107] André Breton's initial *Manifeste du surréalisme* was published in 1924, the same year as Claire-Solange. While it was not necessarily a direct source of aesthetic inspiration for Lacascade, the beginnings of the surrealist movement and its evolution from dadaism were contemporaneous to Lacascade's writing. Freudian psychoanalysis had already begun to influence literature in this period, following the publication of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899. Freud's 1913 publication of *Totem and Taboo* furthermore applied psychoanalysis to primitivist anthropology, providing a psychoanalytic influence on primitivist literature and art that became popular in modernist and surrealist circles. Breton and the surrealist movement more broadly would become an important influence on the Négritude writers in the next decades. The 1932 publication of *Légitime défense* by a group of radical Antillean writers based in Paris which provides an opening manifesto crediting Breton and other surrealists as well as Freud as important influences. When Breton traveled to Martinique in exile during the Nazi occupation of France, he befriended and worked alongside Aimé Césaire.

> crissement de la feuille de latanier, et le frôlement innombrable des termites qui dévorent le chaume. (221)
>
> In a hut with a straw roof two Black, a man and a woman, are contained. […] The woman gets up and lets fall again, with an immutable cadence, a heavy sack of sesame seeds that she should use, right away, to make the daily sauce. The man grunts; the woman stops her work and passes him a kola nut, with a pinkened shell, that he begins to chew. […] Inside of the hut, all that can be heard is the munching of jaws, the screeching of the palm leaves, and the rustling of innumerable termites devouring the thatch.

Lacascade introduces this dream with language that builds a metaphorical association between humans and vegetation, for Claire-Solange is "transplanted," an agricultural metaphor echoing Lacascade's previous comparisons of the creole to livestock, and again resonating with Césaire's concept of the "plant-man." Images of plants frame this domestic scene: the straw roof, sesame seeds, the kola nut, the palm leaf, and these plants are indexes of a tropicalist primitivism associated with an exoticized fantasy of Africa, but also potentially a representation of the Caribbean through the similarities in the tropical vegetation. The scene indexes agrarian poverty in which the couple are menaced by the destruction of termites, indicating a bleak psychological devouring in which the chewing of the humans blends with that of the termites, symbolically merging the man into the insects. While this is far removed from the circumstances of Claire-Solange's European wedding, the unchanging pounding of the pestle and the rustling of innumerable termites seems to suggest that this event is on some level an experience of psychological destruction, in demonstration of Maryse Condé's assertion, "Ce qui nous passionne, c'est la psychologie de Claire-Solange" (*Littérature Féminine* 157)[108]. If this scene is meant as a primitivist valorization of domesticity, it does not reflect this back onto Claire-Solange's marriage. The couple are both Black and non-European, situating this scene as an inaccessible counterpart to the representation of marriage to the white representative of the

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[108] "What compels us is the psychology of Claire-Solange."

French military and the State. The action of this scene operates within the confines of a heavily regimented and gendered domesticity in which the woman prepares the meal while the man groans, animalistically.[109] While this could be read as an affirmation of Claire-Solange's maintenance of an elite bourgeois status against the primitivist fantasy of the impoverished, racialized colonial subject, there is nothing in Lacascade's narrative to indicate that this groan that deflates the ideal of domesticity does not also permeate its bourgeois European counterpart. If we read this scene as an engagement with a modernist aesthetics, then it poses a counter psychological portrait that works against the affirmative trajectory of the marriage plot, for the primitivist psychological mode returns to reflect the troubling of the European, while failing to represent a real outside.

While a dismissal of the political force of Lacascade's novel would miss the complexity of its engagement with the formation of the racialized, gendered, and colonized subject, Lacascade also does not produce an unequivocally feminist or anti-colonialist politics, but rather generates ambivalence surrounding the narrative possibilities for the figure of the creole woman. Gestures towards an opening away from regimented structures of race and gender in Francophone colonial society and the metropole are met with closures, and Lacascade's blending of primitivist and modernist aesthetics with the traditional genre formation of romance leads to a narrative equivocation of its anti-racist and anti-colonial imagining. Instead of offering up possibilities for feminist thinking and identification, Lacascade's novel presents the available political narratives as problems that cannot adequately be thought or reconciled, which is itself a necessary critique.

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[109] The French verb *grogner*, which Lacascade uses here, can also be applied to animals, meaning "to growl."

The ambivalent and inadequate politics of both Lacascade and Houël's writing is symptomatic of the shortcomings of creole feminine figuration: the remainder of white supremacy and colorism contained in discourses on racial mixing and the failure of a feminine representation to counter the feminized sensationalism and exoticism that has been used to shore up colonial hegemony. Both of these writers' works predate Césaire's original publication of *Cahier d'un retour au pays natale* in 1939 and thus precede the critiques that the *Négritude* movement offered of French colonialism and the potential of feminized modes of representation associated with *doudouism* to reify an exoticizing subjugation of colonized women. Yet a reading of these works for the ways in which they challenge colonial white supremacist discourses while presenting feminized alternatives to the masculinist (trans)nationalism of *Négritude*, and the ways in which they do so *through a creole modernist aesthetics* merits recognition. Both Houël and Lacascade's texts invite a reconsideration of the effects of discourses on gender taken up both in service of and resistance to the French colonial order and racialization in Francophone contexts.

CHAPTER THREE

Suspending the *Voyage*: Jean Rhys's Creole Feminine Geography

When using "creole modernism" as a term, perhaps one of the most well-known Anglophone writers associated with this concept is Jean Rhys, born Ella Gwendolyn Rees Williams in 1890 in Roseau, Dominica.[1] Jean Rhys's mother was from a white Creole family descended from slaveholders and her father was a Welsh expatriate to Dominica. At age 16, Rhys traveled to London for school, and from then on continued to live in Europe until her death in 1979. During her first marriage to Jean Lenglet, Rhys lived in Vienna and Paris, where she famously had an affair with the modernist novelist Ford Madox Ford, whose connections allowed her to begin publishing her writing in *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (1927).[2] While

[1] My use of the concept "creole modernism" is indebted to scholarship on Rhys which instantiates her as the definitional example. Christopher GoGwilt's definition of "creole modernism" focuses primarily on the textual production of indeterminate meanings generated from a creole-inflected linguistic situation (although Rhys did not write in Creole language or dialect). H. Adlai Murdoch provides a definition of "creole modernism" similar to my own as the transposition of the ambiguities and ambivalences that structure the figure of the creole into textual production: "Thus the shifting and structurally unstable inscription of the creole figure echoes, in a key way, critical ambiguities of political structure and social position that shaped the colonial encounter in the region in a number of ways. The suspect beginnings of the term 'creole; as embodying colonialism's repulsion for the fearfully unnameable and unplacable hybrid monstrosity, the undesired product of colonial *métissage*, ultimately overdetermined the ostensibly separate races of white and black, even as the boundaries and practices that presumably separated them were increasingly and unalterably blurred" (Murdoch 146-7). Ankhi Mukherjee complicates a positivist definition of the fluidity and expansiveness of the creole with a reminder of the ways in which the imposition of this identity structured Rhys's experiences of psychological and material hardship: "For Rhys, whose West Indian accent (and her lack of money) kept her out of the English middle class, Creole was not a rhizomatic mode of becoming but the irrefutable and sometimes painful fact of being for a returning white Dominican. While her explorations of Creoleness dally with metaphorical conceptions of the term, and are not always immune to the seductions of ambivalence and hybridity associated with it, the play of signifier is easily thwarted by intransigent notions of biological difference and the pain of raced bodies" (41). See also my Introduction for a discussion on my use of the term "creole modernism" that comes from GoGwilt, Mukherjee, and Murdoch's scholarship on Rhys.

[2] On the subject of her pseudonym, Jean Rhys, which she didn't begin using until she began publishing her writing with help from Ford (she had previously used other stage names as a chorus girl), GoGwilt argues that her choice mixes various signs of ethnic and gendered indeterminacy: "The ambiguity, for example, in the possibly French or English accenting of the first name is linked to an ambiguity in the possibility male or female gender of the pseudonym. (Rhys may have adopted her husband's first name, Jean.) In retrospect, this ambiguously gendered and culturally unmarked English pseudonym may also reveal a career-long contest over the Creole white associations embedded in her birth name, Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams" (GoGwilt 32). In her memoir *Smile Please*, Rhys defined her given name through its connotations of whiteness that she wished to disavow from a young age: "I was fair with a pale skin and huge staring eyes of no particular colour. My brothers and sisters all had brown eyes and hair, why was I singled out to be the only fair one, to be called Gwendolen which means "white" in Welsh, I was told?" (20). Variations on the spelling of Gwendolyn/Gwendolen/Gwendoline occur throughout different sources.

Rhys is known to postcolonial scholars for her final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966),[3] her contributions to modernist literature include four short novels, *Quartet* (1928),[4] *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). These interwar novels are written in a characteristically modernist style with stream-of-consciousness sequences, blanks, and ellipses. Rhys's writings from this period are also known for the thematization of women in financial precarity wandering the urban spaces of Paris and London. As Rhys has acknowledged in her letters and unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please* (1979), her early books featured a strong autobiographical component based on her life experiences including romantic affairs that left her financially dependent on men, work as a chorus girl, alcoholism, impoverishment, and abortion. But of these novels, only *Voyage in the Dark* features an overtly West-Indian protagonist encountering financial difficulty and the alienation of cultural displacement in London, which is due to her position as a white creole as much as her gender, as this novel delves the complicated racial politics of Dominica.[5] The novel's white creole

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While naming is not a central focus of my research, GoGwilt's analysis of the various meanings suggested in her pseudonym may serve as a preface for this chapter as I will return to a discussion in both the footnotes and body of my text of the meanings embedded in Rhys's use of names as they are inflected with creole and counter-normative implications.

[3] *Wide Sargasso Sea* revisits Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) from the perspective of Bertha Rochester, whom Rhys names Antoinette Mason, a white Creole West-Indian woman, immediately following the end of slavery in the British Empire after the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Published much later than Rhys' other novels, it is stylistically and thematically distinct, and this novel is typically not considered as "modernist" literature.

[4] The novel *Quartet* was originally titled *Postures* when first published in the UK. This novel is based on Rhys' affair with Ford Madox Ford and acquaintance with his partner Stella Bowen during the time her first husband, Jean Lenglet was in prison.

[5] Barbaidan poet and scholar Kamau Brathwaite (in)famously critiqued Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* while implying that works by white creole writers should be exempted from the canon of Caribbean literature in *Contradictory Omens* (1974): "While creoles in the English and French 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" (quoted in Metz 90). Many scholars of Caribbean have engaged and challenged Brathwaite's position on Rhys, which he seemingly revised in "A Post-Cautionary Tale of Helen of Our Wars" (1995), referring to "Jean Rhys' great Caribbean novel, **Wide Sargasso Sea**" (quoted in Metz 112, emphasis in the original). Jeremy Metz provides a useful critical overview of this debate over Rhys and the seeming essentialization of racial identities in Brathwaite's writing more broadly. While noting the centrality of this often-cited debate in Rhys scholarship, it is not my aim to enter into it as the broader body of Brathwaite's intellectual and literary production is not the subject of my analysis. My only remark on the subject is that the formation of white creole identities in the Caribbean merits

protagonist Anna Morgan's longings to identify herself with Blackness (echoed by Jean Rhys herself in her autobiography) furnish an ambivalent politics that displaces an understanding of racial violence through the fantasy of Black femininity. It is my argument that Rhys's development of the racial psychology of the white creole woman (the standpoint that she writes from) reflects the ways in which the figure of the "creole" inextricably indexes Blackness and unsettles the concept of whiteness, or the distinctness of racial categories, through the problematic desire to identify as Black and while experiencing the self as viewed through the racializing colonial gaze. The explicit feminine stylistics of Rhys's writing further demonstrates the ways in which European imperialism has produced the figure of the creole as a feminized and dependent subject. Rhys's writing both participates in this objectifying construction of the feminine creole and critiques her forced economic reliance upon white European masculinist figures who subject her to repeated exploitation as a sexual resource. Rhys's negative vision of heterosexuality under European colonialism is commonly acknowledged in the scholarship on her writing. My contribution in extension of this critique is to explicitly engage in a queer reading of Rhys in which I argue that her construction of a creole feminine stylistics results in a projection of a queer desire that is centered on Black femininity and unsettles categorical hierarchies of race, gender, and colonialism. While Rhys's sex workers and impoverished women are always emphatically heterosexual, I argue that the failure of their heterosexuality drifts into hyperbole and is in turn supplanted by an unfulfilled desire for racialized feminine figures. Rhys's fantasy of Black femininity presents a further source of queered longing for a

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critical attention from scholars of whiteness studies and critical race studies and many scholars of Caribbean literature have included Rhys's contributions due to her West Indian cultural background and the centrality of the Caribbean in her writing. See also Chapter 4 for my discussion of Brathwaite's critique of Claude McKay's Jamaican Creole language poetry.

suspended atemporal imagining of a feminized Dominica that refuses the hierarchies of colonial geography.

Voyage in the Dark: Queer Migrations and the Geography of the Metropole

Rhys's most overtly Creole modernist novel, *Voyage in the Dark,* narrates protagonist Anna Morgan's experience of herself constructed as the creole feminine when she migrates to London from Dominica, where she (like Rhys) grew up. After her father's death, her stepmother Hester refuses her financial support, which leads Anna to begin working as a chorus girl. She begins an affair with a much older man, Walter Jefferies, while relying on him for financial support. After Walter ends the affair, Anna continues to struggle financially and gets work as a manicurist through her landlady, Ethel, which leads her to informal sex work. The novel ends with Anna having an illegal abortion that makes her extremely ill and induces her dreamlike remembering of Dominica. Rhys had originally intended to end the novel with Anna's death from the abortion but was forced by her publisher to make changes to allow for a more optimistic possibility of Anna's survival.[6]

Voyage in the Dark develops a complicated atemporal geography of relation in which the colonial space of Dominica is superimposed upon London as the imperial metropole. While making it clear that Anna is West Indian, Rhys avoids naming Dominica, referencing it instead through obfuscation. When another chorus girl brings Anna into a sex work-adjacent situation,

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[6] Rhys described her reluctance to revise her ending in a letter to Evelyn Scott (June 10, 1934): "Sadelir of Constable [Rhys' publisher] likes it [*Voyage in the Dark*] and has written very kindly about it but he also wants it cut. Not of course his own taste he explains but to please prospective readers. Evelyn I don't know what to do. I suppose I shall have to give in and cut the book and I'm afraid it will make it meaningless. The worst is that it is precisely the last part which I am most certain of that will have to be mutilated. My dear it is so mad – really it is not a disgusting book – or even a very grey book. And I *know* the ending is the only possible ending" (*Letters* 25). Rhys's original ending in which Anna dies from the abortion is published in Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism*.

introducing her to two men who pay for meals, Anna refuses to specify the island she comes from. She tells one of the men, Joe, about her West Indian origins:

> 'I know, I know. Trinidad, Cuba, Jamaica – why, I've spent years there.' He winked at Laurie.
>
> 'No,' I said, 'a little one.' (124)

In this scene, Dominica is defined through negation of the more recognizable islands and through its smallness and insignificance as "a little one." Upon Anna's arrival in England, Rhys references Dominica indirectly through its geographical coordinates:

> Lying between 15° 10' and 15° 40' N. and 61° 14' and 61° 30' W. 'A goodly island and something highland, but all overgrown with woods,' that book said. And all crumpled into hills and mountains as you would crumple a piece of paper in your hand – rounded green hills and sharply cut mountains. (17)

In addition to obscuring the name by instead providing the coordinates that would require a process of geographic deciphering to locate Dominica on a map, Rhys identifies it through a textbook description, already an inadequate product of colonial knowledge. In this description, Dominica is referred to through its inadequacy and deformation, "overgrown" and "crumpled." Although it is "goodly," this modifier seems to act as a diminutive, conveying a further smallness, inadequacy, or infancy upon the island. Dominica is made to contain juxtaposition and incongruency with its "rounded" hills and "sharply cut mountains," which convey a sense of danger through this sharpness. Rhys's imagery of the island as a crumpled paper in the hand enacts a further sense of erasure, as if the page about Dominica had been torn out of a book. This mirrors Rhys's excision of the name of the island from her text.[7]

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[7] Erica Johnson reads Rhys's vagueness about location as a problematization of the category of the home: "The characteristic inscription of home as an *absence* in her subjects' lives does not mean that her characters are 'homeless,' a term that suggests that home figures as an irreparable site of loss, and assumes that, as migrants, Rhys's characters leave home behind in the West Indies. Rather, the Creole characters in Rhys's fiction *dwell outside of specific cultural and historical constructions of home*, whether they live in the West Indies or Europe"

Despite its erasure in name, the residue of Dominica is still vividly present in *Voyage in the Dark*, overlayed upon the urban metropole of London to produce a complicated geography of simultaneity that creolizes the imperial city. The imposition of the metropolitan space on the colonial periphery is evident through colonial control, but Rhys's inscription of Dominica within the space of London reverses the directionality of power in this paradigm, implying that it is not just the metropole that has formed and inscribed itself upon the colony, but the space of the colony or process of colonization has in turn shaped the metropole – at least in terms of the psychological geography of the colonial subjects who occupy the metropolitan space. Rhys helps us think the creole as a site of simultaneity of time and space, demonstrating that the existence of the metropole is structured through the continuous reminder of its peripheries. This allows Rhys to undermine the hierarchical structure of difference between center and periphery, implying that the process of colonization has "creolized" the metropole as well. The first paragraph of *Voyage in the Dark* enacts this abrupt and incongruous overlap between London and Dominica:

> It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down inside yourself was different. Not just the difference between heat, cold; light, darkness; purple, grey. But a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy. I didn't like England at first. I couldn't get used to the cold. (7)[8]

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(36). While Dominica is vividly present in *Voyage*, in spite of Rhys's refusal to name it, this suggests that London can only serve as a home to Anna when infused with the absent-presence of Dominica.

[8] Sue Thomas argues that Rhys's opening line "It was as if the curtain had fallen" is an allusion to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. According to Thomas, the reference is to a moment when after Dorian's fiancée Sibyl, an actress, has died by apparent suicide after Dorian's ending of their engagement, Lord Henry remarks, "The charm of the past is that it is past. But women never know when the curtain has fallen. They always want a sixth act and as soon as the interest of the play is entirely over they propose to continue it" (quoted in Thomas 75). Thomas interprets this reference as associating *Voyage* with the decadent movement as well as illicit homosexuality following Wilde's trial and exile from England. Thomas also suggests that Rhys might have been drawing a parallel between Sibyl's position as an actress and Anna's as a chorus girl (Thomas pp. 74-76). While this oblique possible gesturing to Wilde is does not sufficiently convey queerness in the text, I will return to a discussion of the possibilities for a queer reading of Rhys in terms of her representation of femininity, compulsory heterosexuality, abortion, and sex work.

While Rhys initially emphasizes the absolute incongruity of the two through sensory contrast (repeating "different" / "difference" five times), notably the shock of England's coldness, Rhys's superimposition of the residue of Dominica upon the space of England is more complex than this initially stated "difference." The initial juxtaposition between hot and cold collapses as Anna becomes ill in her London flat and develops a fever that immediately transports her to the memory of a childhood illness in Dominica. (31) As Dominica's hills and mountains are both sharp and round (17), Rhys's descriptions of incongruities can lead to sameness or a confusion between the different poles. Anna reiterates this spatial confusion, "Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together." (8) The spaces of London and Dominica are both thus indistinguishable and yet ill-fitted to each other. In her letters, Rhys describes theorizing a superimposition of space and time while she wrote the novel, again using the term "dream":

> The big idea – well I'm blowed if I can be sure what it is. Something to do with time being an illusion I think. I mean that the past exists – side by side with the present, not behind it; that what was – is.
>
> I tried to do it by making the past (the West Indies) very vivid – the present dreamlike - (downward career of a girl) – starting of course piano and ending fortissimo. (*Letters* 24)[9]

And again, much later, looking back on her draft of the novel, before she was forced by her publisher to alter the ending, Rhys stated, "I remembered the last part of "Voyage in the Dark" written like that – time and place abolished, past and present the same – and I had been almost satisfied" (*Letters* 233).[10] Rhys's descriptions of her geographical representation indicates an

[9] Letter to Evelyn Scott, February 18, 1934.
[10] Letter to Diana Athill, August 16, 1963.

equivalency between space and time that is both atemporalizing and deterritorializing. Ford Madox Ford noted a similar blending of space in his preface to Rhys's *The Left Bank*:

> Her business was with passion, hardship, emotions: the locality in which these things are endured is immaterial. So she hands you the Antilles with its sea and sky – 'the loveliest, deepest sea in the world – the Caribbean!' – the effect of landscape on the emotions and passions of a child being so penetrative, but lets Montparnasse, or London, or Vienna go. (26)[11]

While Ford's reading of Rhys's spatiality implies a naïve carelessness in Rhys's construction of space, Rhys's letters reveal the intentionality behind her geo-temporal theorization. Rhys is not merely a "child" "let[ting]" things "go." Instead, she is refusing the spatial hierarchies that structure British modernism with the urban metropole (interchangeably London or Paris) as the dominating center. In disrupting distinctions in space and time, she situates the Antilles within the colonial metropole (London in *Voyage in the Dark* and Paris in *Left Bank*), critiquing the ways in which the colonial center remains haunted by its periphery and can be appropriated as a space for theorizing creole colonial experience.[12]

[11] Of the twenty-two stories published in this volume, only two, "Mixing Cocktails" and "Again the Antilles" are set in the Caribbean. "Trio" features Black French Antillean characters and is set in Paris. The remainder of the stories are set in Europe. Nevertheless, Ford's preface implies a residual Caribbean geography superimposed Rhys's contstructs of European metropolitan space.

[12] Several critical readings of *Voyage in the Dark* interrogate Rhys's structuring of colonial space. For example, Caparoso Konzett argues that Rhys deconstructs categories of nationality through her characters wanderings in colonial metropoles: "The contradictions that Rhys experienced in this decaying colonial system are reflected in the displaced and alienated character of her heroines, whose transient and expatriate lives in the metropolitan centers of Paris, London, and Vienna reveal a profound ambivalence about national and cultural identity. This sense of homelessness and dislocation, so pervasive in Rhys's works, challenges not only colonial models of master nations and narrations, with their unquestioned ontologies of belonging, but more importantly, a concomitant mythology of white race" (128). Regina Martin reads Rhys's construction of London as imbued with the geography of the British countryside as an alternate colonial space that reifies the categorical hierarchies of British social class: "Rhys's novel provides us with a window into how the idealization the countryside in British literature performs important ideological work on behalf of the colonial project. Anna's problems originate, in part, with a desire to locate her identity in a colonial geography resembling the idealized British countryside, but her attempt to transcribe the idealized countryside onto the colonial landscape exposes the incommensurability of her Creole experience with metropolitan structures of meaning" (135). Martin clarifies that Rhys's evocations of the countryside are not departures from London, but efforts to impose this alternative colonial geography on the metropole: "In *Voyage*, London does not represent space or a perpetual becoming; instead like the country, London operates according to the logic of the estate, where space is reified into a place that has the power to designate and enforce categorical distinctions" (148). Martin's central argument about the ideological function of spatial constructions in Rhys's writing thus seems counter to Caparoso Konzett's deconstructionist reading of Rhys, while both note the ways in

Extending my discussion in the Introduction of Édouard Glissant's definition of creolization as relationality occurring through *métissage*, I would like to consider the ways in which the geographical scope of Glissant's theory of relation provides insight into Jean Rhys's simultaneous superimposition of time and space, overlaying the colonial periphery on the imperial metropole. In *Discours Antillais*, Glissant describes a "transported space" that is non-specific to a particular historical, geographical, or racial experience but pertains to the minoritized and peripheral:

> Puis, ce temps éclaté, souffert est lié à des espaces « transportés ». Je pense aussi bien aux espaces africains qu'a une espace breton, dont les « souvenirs » viennent se plaquer sur la réalité spatiale que nous vivons les uns et les autres. Confronter le temps, c'est donc ici en nier la linéarité. (436)[13]

Notably for Glissant, the peripheral experience of the African space or Breton space (which is ethnically minoritized within France) is also an experience of atemporality or nonlinearity in which past permeates present through memory. In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant's definition of Relation similarly evades temporal and spatial boundaries to the point of deconstructing the colonial categories of center and periphery. Glissant first builds upon Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the Rhizome to define Relation as a continuously expansive totality: "Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every

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which geographies overlap in her writing. I propose a way of thinking both possibilities together in which the colonial subject cannot be entirely liberated from categories of nationality, yet the critical overlap of colonial geographies need not reify an imperialist power to construct categorical hierarchies. While Anna continually experiences categories of race and class violently projected upon her in the imperial spaces of London and the British countryside, her occupation of these spaces and the inseparability of their geography from Anna's past in Dominica allows Rhys to critique the violent construction geographical categories.

[13] "Also, that this exploded, suffered time is linked to 'transferred' space. I have in mind African space as much as Breton space, the 'memory' of which has become stamped on the spatial reality that we all live. To confront time is, therefore, for us to deny its linear structure" (Dash 144-145). I have chosen to translate "des espaces « transportés »" as "'transported' space" rather than "'transferred' space" because this more closely corresponds to the French terms Glissant uses.

identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (11).[14] Glissant argues that the poet who experiences this relationality is capable of deconstructing geographical and temporal categories: "The poet's world leads from periphery to periphery, and yes, it reproduces the track of circular nomadism; that is, it makes every periphery into a center; furthermore, it abolishes the very notion of center and periphery" (29).[15] While Rhys's construction of space creolizes the geography of London, infusing it with the presence of the Caribbean that contains the history of colonization, genocide, and slavery enacted by the British Empire, unlike Glissant's planetary vision, Rhys's is not a complete abolition of distinction between spaces or between center and periphery. Instead, Rhys's space of relation is a critical geography of empire in which the center must be continually haunted by the residue of its periphery. Yet the periphery is not subordinated. Following Glissant's vision of the "Poetics of Relation" as a transgressive wandering, Rhys's construction of Dominica cooccurs with that of London so that, in her movement through the geography of London, Anna is also occupying the space of her past in Dominica. Rhys thus interrogates the psychological geography of Dominica through her construction of London.

Rhys's critical geography can also be assessed in relation to Mary Louise Pratt's theory of the contact zone. Pratt defines the contact zone as "social spaces where disparate cultures

[14] Glissant again emphasizes that Relation is totality: "To the extent that our consciousness of Relation is total, that is immediate and focusing directly upon the realizable totality of the world, when we speak of a poetics of Relation, we no longer need to add: relation between what and what? This is why the French word *Relation*, which functions somewhat like an intransitive verb, could not correspond, for example to the English term *relationship*" (27)

[15] Glissant specifies the occurrence of this from the presence of people from colonized spaces to the imperial metropole: "Poets from the Caribbean, the Maghreb, and other parts of Africa are not moving toward that elsewhere that is the aim of projectile movement, nor are they returning toward a Center. They create their works in metropolitan regions, where their peoples have made a sudden appearance. The old expansive trajectory and the spirituality of the itinerary (always from Paris to Jerusalem or elsewhere) yield to the world's realized compactness. We have to enter into the equivalencies of Relation" (31). Glissant reiterates his claim that Relation is an abolishment of categorical difference in geography: "Because, as I have already emphasized, these trajectories (from the European here to elsewhere) end up abolishing what yesterday originally occasioned their being: the linear projection of a sensibility toward the world's horizons, the vectorization of this world into metropolises and colonies." (31-2)

meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (4).[16] Rhys's creole geography is intimate and embodied, transporting the remainder of the colonial space and aftermath of slavery onto the self. After evoking her family's participation in slavery, Anna repetitively remembers the name of a slave from the ledger of her family's estate, "Maillotte Boyd, aged 18, mulatto, house servant" (53).[17] The narration of this memory, entangled with Anna's memories of boarding school, occurs in overlap with the narrative of her having sex with Walter. Rhys thus replaces the narration of sexual intimacy with the haunting of slavery:

> [Mother St Anthony] would say, 'Children, every night before you go to sleep you should lie straight down with your arms by your side and your eyes shut and say: "One day I shall be dead. One day I shall lie like this with my eyes closed and I shall be dead." ' 'Are you afraid of dying?' Beatrice would say. 'No, I don't believe I am. Are you?' 'Yes, I am, but I never think about it.
> 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*. (55-56)

[16] Pratt reiterates and develops this definition to specify that this is a (post)colonial space: "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. I borrow the term "contact" here from its use in linguistics, where the term contact language refers to improvised languages that develop among speakers of different native languages who need to communicate with each other consistently, usually in context of trade. Such languages begin as pidgins, and are called creoles when they come to have native speakers of their own. Like the societies of the contact zone, such languages are commonly regarded as chaotic, barbarous, lacking in structure." (6) Pratt's definition of the contact zone notably implies the notion of the creole, invoking creole languages as formed through the history of colonialism and invoking transgressive mixture.
[17] The name "Maillotte" contains a blend of significations of colonization and dispossession of the enslaved. "Maillotte" is not a typical French first name, but rather a surname, perhaps indicating family ownership and denial of personhood through the lack of an individual name. It also bears a homophonic resonance with Mayotte, another island colonized by France located in the Indian Ocean near Madagascar, perhaps tracing a historic connection with other sites of colonization and evoking the history of Dominica's dual colonization by France and England.

Anna's memories blend the experience of sexuality with death, as well as the residue of sexual violence enacted against enslaved women. Rather than providing temporal differentiation between the narratives, the italicized lines hybridize evocations of slavery and the past moment of thinking about death with the present action of sexual intimacy. The joke about Anna's orgasm as "the Little Death," translating the French euphemism for orgasm, *la petite morte* also draws on this conflation. Significantly, in addition to invoking the enslaved woman, Maillotte Boyd, Anna's experience of sex is also narrated in parallel to the scene of her "lying so still" next to her childhood friend, Beatrice Agostini, who Anna had previously described: "She came from Venezuela, she was a boarder. I liked her awfully" (53). While Beatrice's racial identity is unknown, she is still a figure of ethnic difference as non-European and Venezuelan, thus from a Spanish colonial context as opposed to English or French. Rhys's superimposition of Anna's intimacy with Beatrice over and against her sexual experience with Walter suggests a possible queerness, situating this moment of childhood friendship in equivalence with adult sexuality. Even with this queer possibility, Rhys represents sexuality in negative terms as a source of death that is literalized in her original intended ending in which Anna dies from an abortion. I will return to a discussion of the queerness of this ending's depiction of sexual transgression resulting in death later in this chapter, as well as to Rhys's complicated representation of Black femininity, but first, I read this passage as illustrative of Rhys's evocation of embodied intimacy in her feminized creole geography.[18]

[18] Veronica Gregg establishes a reading echoed by other scholars of Rhys that interprets this passage evoking the enslaved woman "Maillotte Boyd" as establishing an equivalency between the two women that exploits Black femininity in the service of Anna's whiteness: "The physical connection between Walter and Anna is placed under erasure, allowing the repressed Other, the body of the nineteenth-century mulatto slave woman, to return via and between the repressing forces: the white woman's body, constructed as pure, over and against the lascivious black / colored woman and the body of the English upperclass gentleman" (Gregg 118). I don't read this passage as sexualizing Maillotte, rendering her "lascivious," or casting her as the "Other" against whom Anna's white femininity is constructed. Instead, I read this figure of the enslaved woman an evocation of the violence done in the production of the white Creole and Anna's inherited guilt from her slave-holder ancestors. The classification of

In addition to figuring Caribbean geography as haunted by the violence of slavery, Rhys adds to this a recognition of the foundational violence of the genocide of the indigenous people, whose continued presence in the West Indies is structured through the exercise of this incomplete genocidal project. Anna's depression after Walter leaves her is conveyed through her remembering a song (associated with her West Indian childhood) that she then transposes onto the suffering of the indigenous Carib people:

> *'And drift, drift*
> *Legions away from despair.'*
> It can't be 'legions'. 'Oceans', perhaps. 'Oceans away from despair.' But it's the sea, I thought. The Caribbean Sea. 'The Caribs indigenous to the island were a warlike tribe and their resistance to white domination, though spasmodic, was fierce. As lately as the beginning of the nineteenth century they raided one of the neighboring islands, under British rule, overpowered the garrison and kidnapped the governor, his wife, and three children. They are now practically exterminated. The few hundreds that are left do not intermarry with the negroes. Their reservation, at the northern end of the island, is known as the 'Carib Quarter.' They had, or used to have, a king. Mopo, his name was. Here's to Mopo, King of the Caribs! Buy, they are now practically exterminated. 'Oceans away from despair. . . . (105)

Fitting the song lyrics to the particularity of the Caribbean, Anna insists that the term "legions" must be replaced by "Oceans" and that this must instead be altered to reflect the specificity of the "Caribbean Sea." In immediately associating the Caribbean Sea with the Carib people, for whom

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Maillotte as "mulatto" also indexes the history of sexual violence enacted upon enslaved women, as the "mulatto" slave was often the product of rape by white planters. Sue Thomas reads a different passage where, after she realizes she is pregnant, Anna describes a dream on a ship where "somebody had fallen overboard" (Rhys 164-5) as evocative of the middle passage. Thomas argues, "With the condensation characteristic of dreams, 'somebody had fallen overboard' resonates with the history of enslaved people being thrown overboard from slaving ships, most infamously from the *Zong* in 1781, when 132 enslaved people were killed or pressed to suicide so that the ship owners could claim their insurance value of 30£ each" (87). Anna's inclusion of these moments of historic violence in the atemporal geography of Dominica is central to Rhys's representation of Anna's geographical consciousness. I disagree, however with Thomas's interpretation of these references as indicating Anna's identification with the position of an enslaved woman and see it more as Anna's experience of the haunting residue of the history of slavery that is foundational to the constitution of the creole subject (of any race). There is no equivalence or assimilability in sexual violence enacted against the free (white) woman and the sexual violence enacted against enslaved women. Sexual violence during slavery was systemic, dehumanizing, and aimed at reproducing the structure of slavery (literally the reproduction of enslaved bodies through the slaveholder "fathering" babies to enslave). I do not, however, believe that Rhys was necessarily trying to produce an equivalence by referencing this history.

it is named, Anna encapsulates the violent history of genocide in her geographical construction of Dominica.[19] In narrating the history of the "Carib Quarter," she posits an alternative anti-colonial geography of Dominica that envisions a continued indigenous presence. H. Adlai Murdoch provides an extensive reading of this evocation of indigeneity:

> For in fact, the insertion of the Caribs complicates the spaces and discourses of Anna's un/belonging and alienation in a number of critical ways. Firstly, the fact that the Caribs are the only ethnic group in Dominica – or in the wider Caribbean, for that matter – who can lay claim to originary, or first nation status, effectively designates all other groups as other, including the white Creoles from whom Anna springs and the black Creoles to whom she gives her subjective allegiance. (156)[20]

Murdoch's reading seems to interpret the political impetus of this passage the way other scholars have interpreted Rhys's evocation of slavery through Anna's repetition of the name of the enslaved woman "Maillotte Boyd": by projecting the genocidal violence enacted against the Carib people onto her individual suffering, Anna "is effectively eliding the history of suppression, exclusion and eradication that undergirds and overdetermines the temporality of the encounters between white Creoles and Caribs in a colonial context" (Murdoch 157). I offer a counter reading to Murdoch's suggestion that Anna (and by extension Rhys) appropriates this experience to describe a white woman's personal suffering. Instead, I see these passages in *Voyage* as providing recognition of the residues of the violences of colonialism and slavery that are never historically over. I read this passage as Anna's political refusal to align herself with the white creole perpetrators of genocide and enslavement, even if they are her ancestors.

[19] For a broader exploration of how historical and cultural narratives of the Caribbean deploy the figure of the creole (including the Black Creole) to enact the erasure of indigenous presence, see Shona Jackson's *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean*. I discuss Jackson's critique in more detail in my Introduction and Chapter 1.

[20] Murdoch provides a helpful overview of the history of indigenous presence in Dominica and the instantiation of the "Carib Quarter": "Indeed, the so-called 'Carib Quarter' or Carib Territory of Dominica is to all intents and purposes a 3,700-acre reservation, established by the British in 1903; the Carib Reserve Act, enacted in the year of Dominica's independence in 1978, reaffirmed the Carib Territory's boundaries and the principles and practices of local government for its population of about 3,000" (157).

Rhys establishes a geographical overlap that occurs through the narration of sexuality and intimacy (for example Anna's memories of Beatrice). To understand this, I turn to a feminist framing of Glissant's concept of Relationality, examining the ways in which relation occurs specifically through gendered and sexualized embodiment and the intimate. Lisa Lowe defines a planetary geography of colonial relation through the terms of intimacy. While Lowe's theory of intimacy develops from an overarching planetary approach that traces the relocation of indentured laborers from South and East Asia to the Caribbean, she uses the term intimacy specifically to capture the reproductive biopower that circulates under the culture of imperialism as well as the sexual violence that is done to individuals treated as exportable and exploitable commodity/labor:

> Just as we may observe colonial divisions of humanity, I suggest there is also a colonial division of intimacy, which charts the historically differentiated access to the domains of liberal personhood, from interiority and individual will, to the possession of property and domesticity. In this sense, I employ the concept of intimacy as a way to develop a "political economy" of intimacies, by which I mean a particular calculus governing the production, distribution, and possession of intimacy. This understanding unsettles the meaning of intimacy as the privileged sign of liberal interiority or domesticity, by situating this more familiar meaning in relation to the global processes and colonial connections that are the conditions of its production. (18)

Lowe's definition of intimacy captures the ways in which the geographical relation that produces the "creole" subject works through relations of history, race, and geography, as well as gender, sexuality, and sexual violence. Rather than maintaining a traditional definition of intimacy as pertaining to the domestic interior, and thus defined against the political and the global, Lowe's expansion of the term allows for an understanding of the ways in which gender and sexuality are integral to the process of colonialism. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have also revised understandings of intimacy in the public sphere, examining it as a tool of "queer world making" in their essay "Sex in Public":

> Making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation. These intimacies *do* bear a necessary relation to a counterpublic – an indefinitely accessible world conscious of its subordinate relation. They are typical both of the inventiveness of queer world making and of the queer world's fragility. (558)

While Rhys's novel doesn't engage a counterpublic or perform the work of "queer world making" in the sense that Berlant and Warner intend, their thinking of intimacy as a spatial category is useful for understanding Rhys's representation of the non-normative domestic interior. Anna's ability to maintain a room in London is under continual threat due to her financial precarity (and the prejudice of landladies who suspect her of sex work). Rhys thus constructs the domestic interior that Anna occupies as a counter-normative space used for sex work and abortion where the idealized nuclear family fails to materialize. Due to Anna's continuous remembering, the intimate domestic interior space is made to refract the global and the political through the constant presence of Dominica.[21]

Rhys's geography thus posits the suspended presence of Dominica within the feminized and intimate interior space of Anna's London apartment, encapsulating the geographical movement between the two sites through Anna's status as a migrant sex worker, which makes her a figure of mobility and relationality. In "Oceans, Archives, Perverts," Juno Richards makes a compelling argument for an inclusion of sex work and feminized migrants in the scope of queer (as in deviant) femininity in the early twentieth century: "At this moment, queer femininity marks a compounded category, signaling the perverse mobility of the female migrant who illegally crosses borders and the sexual deviance of her domestic labors outside the nuclear

[21] In *Modernist Commitments*, Jessica Berman also suggests intimacy as a category of analysis of Rhys's construction of colonial geographies: "In Rhys's early novels, I claim in this chapter, the interfolding of colonial and metropolitan experience creates an uneven, unruly set of relationships that brings the intimate and global inexorably together but also makes the progress of self-narrative impossible." (42)

family" (534).[22] Richards continues, outlining an archive of queer femininity reframed as "female migrant labor":

> Historians of sexuality and colonialism often focus on a criminal archive, resulting in narratives focused primarily on sex acts between men, because sex between women was rarely prohibited or prosecuted. By shifting our attention to an archive of female migrant labor, this article focuses instead on waged and unwaged acts of social reproduction, beginning with sex work but also including childrearing, housecleaning, and other activities necessary to reproduce individuals and empires. When performed outside the white nuclear family, these typically feminized domestic labors offer an often overlooked ground for the historical construction of normative and deviant sexual identities in the early twentieth century. (Richards 542)[23]

To this conception of deviant femininity, *Voyage in the Dark* adds abortion, which falls under the purview of criminalized sexuality and biopolitical regulation of feminized bodies.[24] Richards makes a case for reading *Voyage in the Dark* as a "queer Atlantic narrative" in these terms.[25]

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[22] Since Dominica was still a British colony at this time, Anna (as well as Rhys) would have been considered British subjects, a privileged status, and not subjected to the same level of biopolitical restriction and surveillance as non-British immigrants. The category of the migrant, however, is still relevant, while acknowledging the varying degrees of privilege and restriction that pertain to this category. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Anna's West Indian background (embodied in her accent) marks her as continuously foreign and racialized (indexing Blackness) despite her legal nationality. It is for this reason apt that Richards includes *Voyage in the Dark* in their discussion of literature about migrant sex workers. Brigitte Chalk argues that although Rhys was not personally subjected to immigration control and restriction, the logic of social classification and control played a broader role in the politics of identity formation that Rhys's writing challenges: "Her fiction suggests that the greatest threat to a marginalized woman like herself and many of her characters emanated not directly from legal channels, but from the classifying eye of the social world, and insidious extension of state power. Characterized by the logic of the passport, Rhys's work demonstrates that definitions of national identity and general habits of classification mediate both interpersonal interactions and self-understanding" (119).

[23] Richards' emphasis on sex work as gendered labor that occurs "outside the white nuclear family" is key to a queer reading of the migrant sex worker as a figure of feminine deviance. This inability to be situated within the heteronormative domestic realm of the white nuclear family also applies to Anna through her failure to achieve a normative heterosexual marriage and her abortion, which provides a negation of reproductive futurity. Regina Martin provides a similar argument that Anna does not inhabit a normative domestic femininity that acts in service of the construct of the nation: "Anna is neither properly feminine nor properly English because she does not serve the interests of the nation as a "reproductive conduit" of the English "race." If Anna cannot claim English identity, she cannot claim femininity and vice versa. And if she cannot lay claim to femininity or national identity, then she cannot lay claim to home on the geopolitical scale of home*land* or, *Voyage* suggests, on the domestic scale of home" (146). Anna Snaith also explains that Anna has been abjected from the category of the British subject: "In *Voyage in the Dark*, colonial and gender identity are inextricable, Anna's Caribbean identity immediately excludes her from the category of Englishwoman, and her work as a chorus girl underscores the racial and sexual inferiority dictated by this exclusion" (143).

[24] Abortion was not legal in the United Kingdom prior to the Abortion Act 1967. Prior to this, providing and procuring abortion was criminalized under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

[25] Richards argues, "To situate *Voyage in the Dark* as a queer Atlantic narrative attends to these more micro-levels of sensation, as well as the broader scope of sex work and same-sex eroticism at the level of the novel's plot"

While readers might see Rhys's writings as insistently heterosexual due to her repeated motif of female dependence on men and impoverishment resulting from to the failure of heterosexual relationships, queer theory has long called for a conception of the queer that cannot be reduced to specific sex acts. A queer reading of Rhys's writing should thus also not be precluded by the absence of biographical evidence that Rhys herself ever engaged in a sexual relationship with another woman or harbored an intense desire to do so.[26] I ground my queer reading of Rhys her portrayal of deviant and criminal female sexuality (which in the historical context of her writing was coded alongside the queer), in the negative affective portrayal of femininity and compulsory heterosexuality, and in the eroticism projected onto Black femininity throughout Rhys's writing.

In addition to sex work, *Voyage in the Dark* represents criminalized femininity through the structural importance of Anna's abortion, which, by denying the (re)production of the nuclear family, challenges the normative social structure of heterosexuality and the biopolitical

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(Richards 554). Richards provides little elaboration of the "same-sex eroticism" of Rhys's novel, but I will return to this topic with a discussion of Rhys's complicated desiring projections onto Black femininity. Richard's takes the term "queer Atlantic" from Omise'eke Tinsley's article "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic." I examine Tinsley's theoretical framing of a queer Black Atlantic in my Introduction and return to a discussion the queer representation of criminalized sexuality in Chapter 4: Claude McKay's Queer Creole Poetics.

[26] In a critical move symptomatic of the problem of reading Jean Rhys through her biography in much of the scholarship on her writing, Veronica Gregg argues "it is only through an examination of Jean Rhys's Creole identity as subjectivity and location (and the ways in which her gender identity is dependent on this) that the structures of Rhys's fiction can be adequately deciphered" (8). While I agree with Gregg's conclusion that an analysis of creole identity as a gendered structure is important to understanding Rhys's writing, the premise of applying this by situating the self of Jean Rhys inside of these categories makes the assumption that Rhys was engaged in an unmediated narration of her life rather than the process of fictional and literary production. I argue that this structure of identity should be considered instead because Anna Morgan is figured as a creole woman and not on the basis of an equation of Rhys with her fictional characters. A more concerning critical move can be found in Lilian Pizzichini's biography of Rhys, *The Blue Hour* (2011), which narrates Rhys's life as following the plot of *Voyage in the Dark* (specifically citing the novel as a source) and uses this as the basis to claim that Rhys engaged in informal sex work in a situation similar to Anna's (Pizzichini 111). Various critics have justified claims to an equivalency between the lived experience of Jean Rhys the person and the fictional narrative of Anna by examining the novels textual origins in Rhys's notebooks with diary entries of her experience working as a chorus girl in London and having an affair with a much older man. Some conversely, some scholars have attempted to "defend" Rhys from allegations of having been a sex worker like her characters. I am not concerned with answering the question as to whether the actual person Jean Rhys did or did not engage in sex work, just as I am not concerned with the question of whether she ever experienced same-sex desire. It is instead my aim to break from this problem in the Rhys scholarship to analogize her fictional representations to some externally "real" construct of the self.

reproduction of the white state.[27] In "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," Barbara Johnson argues that in the poetics of abortion (as opposed to abortion narratives), "there tends indeed to be an overdetermined relation between the theme of abortion and problematization of structures of address" (35). Johnson argues that this occurs through the rhetorical device of apostrophe: "The fact that apostrophe allows one to animate the inanimate, the dead, or the absent implies that whenever a being is apostrophized, it is automatically animated, anthropomorphized, 'personified'" (34). While neither the original nor the published version of Rhys's ending presents abortion in poetic form or features the rhetorical figure of apostrophe, a discussion of the apostrophe's animating function by evoking an external object is still relevant to an understanding of Rhys's abortion narrative. Both the original and published endings suggest a liminal suspension between animation and death. What ultimately gets apostrophized, animated, and transported into the narrative present is Anna's past in Dominica as a stream-of-consciousness, italicized, and unpunctuated evocation of Anna's memories that subsumes the narration of her abortion. In the published version, Rhys radically blends the two geo-temporally disparate narratives of Anna's abortion and her memories of Dominica. For example, Mrs. Polo, the landlady, disapprovingly says, "It ought to be stopped" (185), referring to illegal abortions, which merges into Anna's family's racist condemnation of the whiteface parody enacted by Black Carnival celebrants in Dominica, "*it ought to be stopped somebody said it's not a decent*

[27] While I wish to avoid a biographical reading of Rhys, it is worth noting that in *Smile Please* she implies a personal experience of an abortion after the ending of the affair, which served as the basis for this novel's plot. Rhys describes this abortion euphemistically as an "illegal operation": "After what was then called an illegal operation, I stayed in a flat in Langham Street. I didn't suffer from remorse or guilt. I didn't think at all like women were supposed to think, my predominant feeling was one of intense relief, but I was very tired. I was not at all unhappy. It was like a pause in my life, a peaceful time." (118) In this narration of personal experience, Rhys refuses to associate her abortion with the negative affects of guilt and sadness that are often inscribed onto abortion narratives to make an argument for its criminalization.

and respectable way to go on it ought to be stopped" (184).[28] While both versions end with Anna and the others telling the doctor that she fell in order to conceal the illegal abortion, merging the present with a prior moment of her falling off a horse in Dominica, Rhys's original version provides a more extreme and negative iteration of this fall as a moment of death:

> The horse stopped dead and shot me right over his head
> I was falling for a long time so long that before I touched the earth I had time to say I'm not afraid I'm not afraid I'm not afraid
>
> 'She fell,' Laurie said, 'early this morning.'
> He put his ear down close to my mouth to listen.
> I thought 'Why does he do that?'
> I said 'I fell of[f] the horse.' […]
> It was as if they weren't there. I knew they were talking but their voices sounded small like doll's voices.
>
> And the concertina-music stopped and it was so still so still and lovely like just before you go to sleep and it stopped and there was the ray of light along the floor like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out and blackness comes … (389_

In the published version, this evocation of death is altered by the doctor's insistence, "She'll be all right […]. Ready to start all over again in no time" (187). In the final paragraph, Rhys blends

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[28] There is more to be said about Rhys's representation of the whiteface performance of the Black carnival celebrants. This passage engages themes that I will discuss in greater detail further on of racial ambiguity and Anna's desire for Blackness. Scholars of Rhys have offered detail critical readings of this scene and more broadly the representation of Carnival in Rhys's writing. For example, Mary Lou Emery provides an extensive reading of Rhy's depiction of Carnival, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the Carnivalesque: "[Anna] associates herself with Carnival and chooses to join it, as object of disapproval *and* as member of a community of satirical revelers. Her understanding of the masks and their laughter, rather than the laughter of modern European cynicism, allows her to transform the meanings and values attributed to the masking of her own identities" (*Worlds End* 81). In her later scholarship, Emery argues that Rhys's blended citation of minstrel songs including "Camptown Races" that "explicitly evoke plantation nostalgia, reflecting on [Anna's] split colonial subjectivity and sexual exploitation" enacts transformations of the "plantation myths" that "register in the changes from minstrel masks that perpetuate plantation stereotypes to carnival masks that reverse and undermine them" (*Caribbean* 63). Erica Johnson reads Rhys's representation of the carnival masks as part of a broader thematics of deconstructing categories of identity: "Hence, although as a white person she is barred from donning a mask and dancing in the streets during Carnival, Anna gleans from the event an understanding of the ways in which people construct one another, as she hears and sees racial constructions of the Other from both sides. Her insistence that she identifies with the laughter of the masqueraders rather than her family's racist comments speaks to her experience of identification as a potentially transgressive process. Despite the historical and racial parameters of identity, Anna does grow up with an understanding of the complexity and constructedness of identity that is absent among the English characters who strive to fix and master her identity" (78). See also Chapter 1 for my discussion of the representation of New Orleans' Carnival in Alice Dunbar-Nelson's writing.

this possibility of reproductive futurity, the "starting over" with heterosexuality and pregnancy, into the previous resolution of death:

> When their voices stopped the ray of light came in again under the door like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out. I lay and watched it and thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again…

Rhys's preservation of "the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out" in the published version indicates a duality to this ending in which Anna both dies *and* survives to continuously repeat the experience of sexual commodification, pregnancy, and perhaps also abortion/death. While reading this ending as Anna's continuation into reproductive futurity may have satisfied Rhys's publisher, her edits maintain an ambivalence towards this future, leaving Anna suspended in a liminality between death and continuous reproduction that questions what exactly it would mean for her to "start over."[29] Contrary to her publisher's desires, Rhys thus does not validate the happy possibility of reproductive heterosexuality.[30] Anna's abortion, in fact, forecloses the reproduction or perpetuation of the creole child, refusing a birth that would integrate the creole into the imperial nation (born into London with white British paternity).

Returning to Johnson's argument regarding the use of apostrophe in the poetics of abortion to animate or problematize the process of animation, what gets animated in this final section of the novel is not the aborted fetus or potential child (as is the case with the poetry

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[29] While the concept of "reproductive futurity," now instantiated in queer theory, is taken from Lee Edelman's *No Future*, I personally take issue with Edelman's white male normative framing of this argument, as it overlooks histories of biopolitical control over female bodies' reproductive capacities, including histories of forced reproduction and forced sterilization enacted systematically upon the bodies of women of color, as well as the position of abortion and maternity in (queer inclusive) feminist movements. Foregoing embodied reproduction has simply not ever been the choice for female-bodied people in the way that is has for the male-bodied, regardless of sexual orientation. See also note 44 on the history of forced sterilization of women of color.

[30] See my previous chapter for a discussion of Sara Ahmed's theory of the affective dimensions of compulsory heterosexuality through the cultural association of heterosexual reproduction of the family with happiness in *Queer Phenomenology*.

Johnson analyzes), but the suspended undead past of Dominica. Rhys's stream-of-consciousness narration in this section situates the past in Dominica as though it were literally present and occurring on the same temporal plane as Anna's abortion in London. In Rhys's original version, various deaths merge into the narrative: Anna's mother's death, her father's which is described in parallel to the horse's death – "your father's going to die your father's got heart disease his lips are blue" / "the poor old horse has starved and I looked and him and saw that his lips were blue" (383), Anna saying to Beatrice "haven't you ever wanted to die" (384). Significantly, the original version produces a vision of heterosexuality inflected with violence and repulsion, rewriting the scene of Anna's sexual encounter with Walter to imply that it was a rape: "And I kept saying stop stop please stop will you stop and he said I thought you'd say that" (384-5). Rhys also implies Anna's physical revulsion following sexual intimacy with a man: "I was being sick because his hands had such a lot of hair on them." Anna's intense anxiety over compulsory heterosexuality leads to a broader concern about class inequality generated through social control:

> But there's such a lot to worry about this business about God and this business about children and what happens when you sleep with men and as if that's not enough this business about ladies and gentlemen and common people and some people having everything and others having nothing (387)

Rhys's insistence on death in her original version of the novel's ending thus enacts a refusal of heteronormative sexuality and reproductive futurity with a politically radical impetus. Anne Cunningham reads *Voyage in the Dark* to "theorize a modernist feminine aesthetic of failure" based on "Rhys's heroine's refusal to behave according to British notions of white feminine respectability in work and social situations" (374):[31]

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[31] Cunningham draws notably from Jack Halberstam's analysis of failure and refusal as a feminist affect in *The Queer Art of Failure*. Jessica Berman makes a similar argument about Rhys's characters refusal of a (re)productive futurity in her book *Modernist Commitments:* "In their unwillingness to posit a future for their heroines or to

> The tropes of fragmentation, the split-self, and the problems that Anna encounters due to gendered and race-based hierarchies launch a critique not only of patriarchal femininity, but also conventional notions of liberal feminism. The narrative does not describe a cohesive, self-knowing liberal subject capable of direct action (or activism). Rather, Anna reacts to her conditions by failing and foundering. She is unable to make sense of her identity in the wake of rigorously imposed, socially prescribed, and highly problematic identity categories. (382)

While Rhys's revisions to the ending posit alternatives and leave Anna suspended in a state of liminality rather than insisting on death as the outcome, I read the published version as maintaining a refusal of the heteronormative white feminine social category prescribed onto Anna. In doing so, I extend the reading of negative heterosexuality and negative feminine affect that Cunningham and others address, while expanding on the queer implications of the alternative structures of desire in Rhys's work that posit Black femininity and the geography of Dominica as sites of nostalgic return.

As Anna constructs and animates her past in Dominica, Rhys posits this return as an alternative non-future that, while not providing an outside to the violent imposition of social categories, does suggest a different possibility to what "starting over" could mean. Nothing in the novel suggest the possibility of Anna's literal return to Dominica, but Rhys's atemporal transposition of Dominica onto London indicates that Anna could reinhabit this space, and by extension the space of London, differently. As the ultimate "voyage" undertaken in the novel is into the space of the past, this re-inhabitation of space can coincide with an outright refusal of futurity. A potential metaphor for this possibility occurs through Rhys's evocation of the figure

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reorient their waywardness, Rhys's novels may thus be seen to act politically. Her work not only questions the possibility of a Woolfian leap into the lives of others when from the subaltern rather than the dominant position but also challenges the ease with which an interrupted narrative may be simply resumed or reoriented. Rather than resonate with the productive potential of an involuted or disrupted structure of address, generating a new narrative future beyond the propaganda of war and patriarchy, Rhys's early novels resist the assumption of both continuity and progress" (42-43). Berman compares the political ethics of Rhys's writing to Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas.* While my analysis doesn't concern this specific work by Woolf, I will discuss her first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915) as a potential intertextual reference for Rhys due to the similarity of her novel's title.

of the soucriant (also called soucoyant) from Caribbean mythology, another iteration of negative femininity.[32] After Anna experiences morning sickness and realizes she is pregnant, she compares herself to the soucriant:

> Obeah zombis soucriants – lying in the dark frightened of the dark frightened of soucriants that fly in through the window and suck your blood – they fan you to sleep with their wings and then they suck your blood – you know them in the day-time – they look like people but their eyes are red and staring and they're soucriants at night – looking in the glass and thinking sometimes my eyes look like a soucriant's eyes… (163)

Munroe, undertaking a gothic reading of *Voyage in the Dark*, suggests that the soucriant serves as a figure of liminality that enables Rhys to traverse geographical borders:

> Like the white Creole who might appear to be of European descent but whose racial purity will always be tainted in the minds of the native English by suspicions of miscegenation, the soucriant can pass as human, thereby allowing it to trespass the boundaries of spaces otherwise prohibited to it: the body, the bedroom, the world of the living, the metropole. (127)

There is a limit to which the European mythology of the vampire as the "undead" (thus viewing the intrusion of the colonial space into the metropole as the "undead" per Munroe's reading, which references Bram Stoker's *Dracula*) can be transcribed onto the Caribbean mythology of the soucriant/soucoyant. This would after all be a privileging of the Eurocentric mythology over the Caribbean mythology (a creolization of the European and African) that Rhys explicitly names. While both suck blood, the soucriant/soucoyant is a distinctly feminized figure, part witch, and not necessarily "undead." For Rhys, in *Voyage in the Dark*, the Caribbean space isn't a deadened past vampirically revived in London, but an unbound suspension continuous across time, which implies that the presence of Domincia cannot be contained or confined within the

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[32] The soucriant/soucoyant is a feminine monster that has been compared to the vampire of European mythology because it arrives in the night to suck blood. As I explain, however, there are crucial differences between the soucriant/soucoyant and the vampire, particularly that the soucriant/soucoyant is explicitly feminine gendered, whereas the vampire (although potentially female) is primarily masculine gendered through the prominence of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in the European cultural imaginary. Due to the gendering of the soucriant/soucoyant, a potentially more apt figure of comparison in European folklore would be the witch.

colonial order. It is also important to read Rhys's soucriant as a specifically feminine figure, transmitted through storytelling between West Indian woman, notably from the stories of her family's domestic worker Meta: "It was Meta who talked so much about zombies, soucriants, and loups-garoux. […] Soucriants were always women she said, who came at night and sucked your blood. During the days they looked like ordinary women but you could tell them by their red eyes" (Rhys *Smile* 30). By referencing the soucriant, Rhys thus draws on a powerful feminine figure who exists outside of and poses a threat to the social order and who is located within the cultural history of the Caribbean, which Rhys transports to London. By representing Anna as a soucriant, Rhys re-figures Anna's depression and illness, resulting in "red eyes" as a powerful refusal to occupy a normative social position.

As stated in my introduction, it is my contention that Anglophone modernism more broadly constructs the creole (as a feminized figure potentially associated with sex work) to traverse spatial categories and reflect an ambiguous and ambivalent relationality between gender and geography. In the whole of *Ulysses*, for example, James Joyce uses the term "creole" exactly once, and in my view, it is significant that this occurs in "Episode 15" (Circe) in which Bloom visits the brothel and adopts a feminine gender though an encounter with the sex worker Bella/Bello whose gender shifts between feminine and masculine. In this scene, the figure of "Creole Sue" is named by Elijah (the Biblical prophet who appears in this episode) as part of an assortment of onlookers:

> ELIJAH: No yapping, if you please, in this booth. Jake Crane, Creole Sue, Dove Campbell, Abe Kirschner, do your coughing with your mouths shut. Say, I am operating all this trunk line. Boys, do it now. God's time is 12.25. Tell mother you'll be there. Rush your order and you play a slick ace. Join on right here. Book through to eternity junction, the nonstop run. Just one word more. Are you a god or a doggone clod? If the second advent came to Coney Island are we ready? Florry Christ, Stephen Christ, Zoe Christ, Bloom Christ, Kitty Christ, Lynch Christ, it's up to you to sense that cosmic force. […] (Joyce 477)

While “Creole Sue” is not a character appearing elsewhere in the novel, her invoked presence in the brothel suggests a potential association of sex work with her identity as “Creole.”[33] While the other figures in this assortment are given last names, she is the only one who is not, her first name “Sue” being displaced by “Creole” as the primary signifier of her identity. The generic nature of “Sue,” a relatively common Anglophone name in the twentieth century, alongside the absence of a surname suggests it is merely a stand-in for individuality, that “Creole Sue” could be any evocation of a racialized woman connected to colonialism in the Americas. *Ulysses* famously enacts the concept of the “voyage” in the condescend urban space of Dublin. While not a colonial metropole like London, Joyce’s evocation of a creole presence in Dublin (even when relegated to minor detail) suggests an overlaying of colonial histories, a superimposition of spaces formed by British imperialism, while also evoking Dublin’s geographic situation as a port city, and thus a space of maritime traffic and exchange. I read the figure of the creole’s presence at this particular moment in *Ulysses* as indicative of the creole’s potential to index and absorb associations of queer femininity (through the conjunction of Bloom and Bella/Bello’s gender transitions and Joyce’s representation of a queer transgressive sexuality, which is also aligned with sex work) alongside the blending and overlap of colonial space. Following my argument that the creole indexes femininity, and thus that there is a gendered dimension to this figure even though it is not a gendered term, it is significant that the figure of “Creole Sue” is feminine gendered, and that the brothel is both a space for Bloom’s transition into femininity and a space that is structured through the presence of the feminized sex workers.[34]

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[33] This is also the only evocation of a person named “Sue” in *Ulysses*.

[34] Even though it could be argued that the brothel provides a space for Bella/Bello’s transition into masculinity and that it is also occupied by predominantly male clients, the figure of the sex worker is persistently gendered feminine in the cultural imaginary (despite the existence of male sex workers). Additionally, the presence of the male clients

Another modernist evocation of the voyage that Rhys arguably references in her novel's title is Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), which narrates a group of British tourists' voyage to South America.[35] While the exact location of Woolf's characters' voyage into South America is unnamed, much like Dominica in Rhys's novel, it also lacks the geographical specificity that would allow identification, which makes Woolf's refusal of a name a symbolically charged choice different from Rhys's. Instead, Woolf's South America operates synecdochally so that one non-specific location comes to represent the whole of the continent, or perhaps the whole of the tropical American space, which would include the Caribbean. Woolf's protagonist, Rachel Vinrace's death from a fever caught from contact with the tropical space near the novel's end is parallel to Rhys's original ending with Anna's death from an abortion. Much as Rhys's construction of Anna's memories superimposes the space of Dominica upon the metropole of London, Woolf's narration of Anna's fever similarly collapses time and space to evoke the space of London (referenced by the Thames) transposed in an atemporal suspension onto Rachel's location in South America. Woolf first describes Rachel's delirium during her fever as both a suspension of time and a collapsing of geography in which the only distinctions remaining are between Rachel's bedroom and the homogenized "outer world":

> The second day did not differ much from the first day, except that her bed had become very important, and the world outside, when she tried to think of it, appeared distinctly further off. The glassy, cool, translucent wave was almost visible before her, curling up at the end of the bed, and as it was refreshingly cool she tried to keep her mind fixed upon it. Helen was here, and Helen was there all day long ; sometimes she said it was

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in the brothel is transitory, whereas this space is inhabited, managed, and constructed through the presence of (female) sex workers.

[35] Ankhi Mukherjee for example argues that "In Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), whose title and theme—the book's Anglo Caribbean protagonist, Anna Morgan, is voyaging from the West Indies to London—consciously evoke Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (29). While a case could be made for Rhys's intertextual engagement with Conrad's novel, I am more interested in her potential indexing of Woolf's *The Voyage Out* due to this novel's similar focus on the identity formation of a white (British) woman through contact and contamination with the colonial zone of the Americas (through a journey to South America in the case of Woolf's novel).

lunchtime, and sometimes that it was teatime ; but the next day all landmarks were obliterated, and the outer world was so far away that the different sounds, such as the sounds of people passing on the stairs, and the sounds of people moving overhead, could only be ascribed to their cause by a great effort of memory. (329-30)

Rachel's reliance on "memory" to interpret the sounds of people walking in the narrative present indicates that perception must be mediated by a knowledge of the past, blurring distinctions between disparate moments in time. While the wave could reference oceanic transit and Rachel's voyage to South America, the watery image transports Rachel instead back into the geography of London, merging with the Thames:

> Rachel again shut her eyes and found herself walking through a tunnel under the Thames, where there were little deformed women sitting in archways playing cards, while the bricks of which the wall was made oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down the wall. But the little old women became Helen and Nurse McInnis after a time, standing in the window together, whispering incessantly. (331)

It seems significant that Rachel's hallucinations are antipatriarchal. Later, when her fiancé Terence kisses her, she sees "an old woman slicing a man's head off with a knife" (339). In a less violent way, the "deformed women" in the subterranean tunnel seem to exist outside of patriarchal structures of power.[36] Hiding out in this alternate space of London, the perform the non(re)productive activity of "playing cards," literally cast outside of categorical formation in their description as "deformed." While Terrence eventually accepts Rachel's death as achieving "their complete union and happiness" (353), he first views her illness as categorically removing her from the construct of heterosexual marriage:

> The vision of Rachel as she was now, confused and heedless, had almost obliterated the vision of her as she had been once long ago ; he could hardly believe that they had ever

[36] The tunnels under the Thames were initially constructed for the purposes of transit, either as footpaths or for the London Underground, which first opened in 1863. While the space of transit would be a public space facilitating commerce and carefully managed by the urban planning of the city, Woolf's evocation of these tunnels as a subterranean space seems to place them outside of the managed urban public space and evoke an alternative inverse underground geography of the metropole.

> been happy, or engaged to be married, for what were feelings, what was there to be felt? (335).

This affective rejection of Rachel's suitability as a wife, in which his relation to her is beyond the possibility of feeling ("what was there to be felt?"), is then echoed in fellow tourist St. John's claim that the queerness of the tropical climate psychologically contaminates those exposed. When discussing the hot weather that coincides with Rachel's fever, St. John states, "I suppose the heat does something funny to people's brains. Even the English go a little queer" (336). In enacting a similar symbolic erasure of distinction as Rhys does with the slippage between the hot tropical climate and the febrile heat of illness, Woolf also has St. John give voice to colonialist discourses of tropical degeneracy, significantly implying that this heat has contaminated the category of the proper British subject, "even the English," and rendered them categorically degenerate or "queer." [37]

The Queer Fantasy of Black Femininity

Anna's experiences of sexuality in London occur over and against her prior memories of Dominica, but also tend to manifest figures of Black femininity, adding a queer dimension to Rhys's geographical constructions. Examining the recurring figures of Black female domestic workers in Rhys's writing, Veronica Gregg argues that this representation relies upon an objectification of Blackness in order to construct a white self, that "the white Self in the

[37] In an analysis of Nella Larsen's 1929 novel *Passing* that builds on Deborah McDowell's queer reading in her introduction to the novel, Judith Butler argues for a queer dimension (in terms of sexuality) to Larsen's repeated use of the word "queer" as both an adjective and a verb: "At the time, it seems, 'queer' did not yet mean homosexual, but it did encompass an array of meanings associated with the deviation from normalcy which might well include the sexual. Its meanings include: of obscure origin, the state of feeling ill or bad, not straight, obscure, perverse, eccentric." (*Bodies That Matter* 176). I follow Butler in considering a more expansive meaning of the use of the term "queer" in modernist texts as potentially invoking queer sexuality and challenges to normative constructs of heterosexuality. I will return to a discussion of the use of the term "queer" in a reading of Rhys's short story "La Grosse Fifi" (1927).

Caribbean is constructed over and against that of the black Other" (Gregg 38). Gregg provides the more condemning reading of Rhys's structuring of Creole identity as reliant only on racial appropriation and the logic of possession: "The forms of (Creole) selfhood that Rhys's writing elaborates are racially inflected. The profoundly racialized, even racist, structure of her imagination insistently reveals itself in her use of West Indian "black people" as props to the Creole identity and as cultural objects" (37). In reading Rhys's descriptions of Black domestic workers who cared for her as a child in her memoir *Smile Please*, Gregg identifies an "Africanist" dimension (drawing from Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*): "The rhetoric of the black Other as hateful and destructive and as good, loyal servant is contained by and in the knowledge of white subjectivity. […] In *Smile Please* the black Other occupies a wide range of discursive locations contingent upon the desires or positions from which the narrated self speaks" (65). While the stereotyped and even racist dimension of Rhys's depiction of Black feminine figures should be acknowledged, I argue that Gregg's analysis doesn't grant enough attention to the insistently feminine gendering of Blackness in Rhys's writing (to the extent that Black figures in her writing are almost exclusively feminine). This goes beyond the figure of the Black domestic worker that Gregg focuses on (who, while stereotyped, was arguably also Rhys's most intimate source of contact with Blackness during her childhood in Dominica) and also includes failed possibilities of friendship with Black or ambiguously racialized girls (occupying a more egalitarian status as Rhys's peers) onto whom Rhys projects a complicated sense of desire. Regardless of whether Rhys (the named individual) ever felt or articulated any sense of physical or sexual attraction in her desiring projections onto these Black feminine figures, I read these evocations of a failed relationality with Black women in *Voyage in the Dark* (and Rhys's writing more broadly) as a site of queer longing and (im)possibility. To reiterate, my queer reading of

Rhys's fictional portrayals of desire and intimacy directed at Black femininity are not to diagnose Rhys the person's private sexual desires and feelings, which are ultimately unknowable with any certainty, nor to interrogate her individual racism (which is a product of her position in the racial colonial power structure), but rather to read the figuration of the creole as pertaining to a queer structure of desire and identification inflected with ambivalent possibilities to both disrupt and reinforce imperial biopower, as this power itself has produced the ambiguous categories of the creole.[38]

In addition to the haunting echo of Maillotte Boyd, whose death in slavery overlays Anna's orgasm with Walter and coincides with the evocation of Anna's ambiguously ethnicized childhood friend Beatrice, Anna's memories develop a nostalgic longing for her family's Black domestic worker, Francine. While Francine could be read as an alternate maternal figure who replaces Anna's own deceased mother and negative maternal representation of her stepmother Hester, who treats Anna cruelly and continuously gives voice to the ideology of European racism, I read the evocations of Francine as inflected with a queer erotic potential that goes beyond the trope of the Black female domestic worker.[39] Reading this as a queer erotics does not

[38] My insistence on a reading of Rhys's writing about race as an interrogation of structures of imperial power rather than a biographical investigation into what Rhys the person actually thought also draws from the pitfall of white feminist scholarship's focus on the "individual" that Gayatri Spivak identifies in her essay "Three Woman's Texts": "The broad strokes of my presuppositions are that what is at stake, for feminist individualism in the age of imperialism, is precisely the making of human beings, the constitution and "interpellation" of the subject not only as individual but as "individualist." This stake is represented on two registers: childbearing and soul making. The first is domestic-society-through-sexual-reproduction cathected as "companionate love"; the second is the imperialist project cathected as civil-society-through-social mission. As the female individualist, not-quite/not-male, articulates herself in shifting relationship to what is at stake, the "native female" as such (*within* discourse, *as* a signifier) is excluded from any share in this emerging norm" (244-5).

[39] While acknowledging the potential for Rhys's construction of Black femininity through the figure of the Black female domestic worker/nanny to rely on and reify racial stereotypes of this figure and use this figure as an object for interrogating the white self, I argue that Rhys's portrayal of Black femininity is more complex due to the way that it is continuously evoked as a site of desire with queer and non-colonial impulses and disaffiliation from the power structures of whiteness. When discussing another figuration of Black femininity through the domestic worker Christophine in Rhys's later novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Gayatri Spivak argues that the narrative marginality of Christophine is symptomatic of the impossibility of a colonial narrative envisioning the colonized subject as a self: "As I mentioned above, Christophine is tangential to this narrative. She cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition. No perspective *critical* of imperialism can

mean that Rhys doesn't objectify and exoticize Black femininity, for most of her Black female characters are relegated to the margin and serve as a source for one-directional affective identification by Rhys's white protagonists. Anna's fever is one of several moments in the text that presents a simultaneity of Dominica and London, and significantly, this moment projects a desire for intimacy with Francine that is entangled with Rhys's geographic formulations:

> It got dark, but I couldn't get up to light the gas. I felt as if there were weights on my legs so that I couldn't move. Like that time at home when I had fever and it was afternoon and the jalousies were down and yellow light came in through the slats and lay on the floor in bars. The room wasn't painted. There were knots in the wood and on one of them a cockroach, waving its feelers slowly backwards and forwards, I couldn't move. I lay watching it. I thought, 'If it flies on to the bed or if it flies on to my face I shall go mad.' […] And then night outside and the voices of people passing in the street – the forlorn sound of voices, thin and sad. And the heat pressing down on you as if it were something alive. I wanted to be black, I always wanted to be black. I 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)[40]

Rhys conveys this scene of one of absolute blending and non-differentiation. Anna's fever in London immediately transfers the narrative to her prior fever in Dominica, which is then becomes instead an effect of the tropical heat as "the heat pressing down on you" evokes both

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turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self" (253). While my intention is not to undertake an analysis of racial representation in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, I note Spivak's reading of this text because Christophine occupies a similar position and relationality to the white creole figured by Antoinette Mason in *Sargasso* as Francine does to Anna in *Voyage*.

[40] Richards argues that Anna's fever in London, which leads to the memory of her prior illness in Dominica, is evocative of the 1919 influenza pandemic which resulted from a global network of contagion that again reflects the impetus to restrict and regulate migrant sex workers, the fear of the spread of venereal disease: "Here is a form of affiliation that is deadly, involutional, and yet a profoundly intimate connector of persons. In this way, Rhys shifts our attention from a fantasy of interracial identification to a nightmare of microbial contagion, ending with one of the catastrophic outcomes port city biometric regimes were established to prevent. It is a profoundly critical, deeply depressing rendering of intersubjective bodily feeling as a sense-method that yokes together intimate care and violence. This yoking together, of care and violence, occurs between individual persons in a single setting and also across a more biopolitical register, in that it hypothesizes a population under threat. To read for the pandemic suggests an alternative, wider geography for the novel, as a route between the individual body that is Anna, the *you* of the reader, and the wider social body of empire, crossing between England, the Caribbean, and the rest of the world." (Richards 559).

Anna's illness and Francine's sweating from performing the labor of fanning Anna in the heat. This then results in the reductive analogy between climate, affect, and race: "Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad." The transference of Anna's fever to Francine's sweat results in a further blending of bodies, enacting the intimate symmetry that Anna desires to achieve with Francine, casting racial difference as the sole barrier to this fantasy of idyllic sameness.

Rhys periodically returns to negative descriptors of whiteness throughout the novel that undermine the aesthetic privileging of whiteness as the foundation for European racial hierarchies. The description of Anna's horror and disgust at the cockroach "waving its feelers slowly backwards and forwards," associating the insect with a frighteningly excessive permeation of space, picks up Rhys's other repeated evocation of the insect in analogizing white people to "woodlice." For example, after making another comparison of colors in England and Dominica, Anna notes "the white of people's faces – like woodlice" (54).[41] This comparison reverses the common racist trope of comparing people of color to non-human animals and insects. Woodlice can take on a range of shades ranging from pale tan to brown to black, which detaches the equivalency Anna establishes between whiteness and woodlice from an actual symmetry or legibility based on color. Instead, this comparison casts whiteness as invasive, expansive, and parasitic through the symbolic imaginary (although the actual animal, the woodlouse, is not).

[41] Woodlice, also called "pill bugs" among other names, are technically crustaceans, not insects. They are also not parasitic, contrary to the implication of the name "lice." They have a broad geographical range and are not particularized to either Europe or the West Indies. While recognizing that in scientific taxonomical classification they are not insects, I am considering them as occupying the symbolic category of "insects," like the cockroach, due to their resemblance to insects and association with insects in the popular imaginary (as indicated by their colloquial naming as "bugs" and "lice").

Anna’s visceral aversion to whiteness is paired with an intense longing to identify with Blackness that coalesces around her childhood intimacy with Francine. Anna’s statements in the above passage, “I wanted to be black, I always wanted to be black” immediately lead to the “happy” affect of Francine’s presence as the text’s central Black feminine figure (31). Her desire for Blackness and impetus to reject her own whiteness is also projected through a desire for an impossible intimacy through sameness with Francine:

> Francine was there, washing up. Her eyes were red with the smoke and watering. Her face was quite wet. 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 that 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. Being white and getting like Hester, and all the things you get – old and sad and everything (72)

Rather than considering the socioeconomic factors that prevent Francine as a working-class Black Dominican from feeling an intimacy with the elite white family that employs her, Anna focuses on a de-historicized decontextualized sense of racial difference as the preventative barrier. The untranslatability of the “something in patois” in Rhys’s text, mirroring Anna’s inability to understand Francine’s patois speech at this moment points to a radical asymmetry in understanding that Anna’s desires could never bridge. As the interiority of Francine remains on the textual margins (she is never developed as a character) and encapsulated as inaccessible thorough the failure of Anna’s understanding of her speech, the possibility of intimacy with the figure of Black femininity is relegated to a nostalgic longing for what could never be.

To further complicate representations of Black female domestic workers in relation to white creole women, Omise’eke Tinsley provides a queer reading of this relationality, arguing that while not decolonial and revolutionary, a white creole woman’s queer erotic desire for Black

femininity undercuts white heteropatriarchal biopolitical structures that require the reproduction of whiteness to ensure a colonial futurity:[42]

> While a white Creole woman's erotics of self-making in the image of a black mother does not transcend racialized subject formations – the nanny-girl relationship, after all, is based in these formations – neither does it read as sexual imperialism. The black woman influences the white here, creating affective colonizations in reverse. To the extent that this erotics impedes white women's reproductive labor and disrupts heterosexuality as the cradle of whiteness, it becomes anticolonial – mixing, messing up the colonial elite's family structures – without necessarily becoming decolonizing. That is, it does not necessarily imagine space outside the realm of fantasy in which white and black women could interact horizontally. (79)[43]

Tinsley argues that in discourses of colonialism, "The white Creole woman must be *heterosexual* to reproduce the elite; yet at the same time she must be *asexual*, an icy creature who conceives children without autonomous desire that might lead her to choose her own partners outside the white male elite" (77). While Anna's desiring evocations of Francine are not unambivalently radical there is still thus an anticolonial potential, following Tinsley's argument, to disrupt the process of colonial domination through the refusal of white reproductive futurity. To emphasize the extent to which racialized femininity is inflected with erotic potential in Rhys's novel, while Anna is having sex with white men, she thinks of Francine (and other racialized women). Rhys's choice to end the novel with Anna's abortion completes this refusal of a white reproductive futurity in which the white nuclear family fails to become a possibility.

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[42] Tinsley describes a structure of dual maternity by white elite mothers and Black nannies in the colonial West Indies that is familiar as well in Rhys's writing: "But in the Caribbean, the elite white child is brought up intimately disciplined by at least two mothers: the bridge-playing in white linen and the black *da* (nurse) she clings to while mama is at the club. While reproducing whiteness necessitates turning children over to black care takers as a sign of status, these child-rearing relationships also become sites of disciplinary and other intimacies; and, in her preparation to stand alone at the top of the social pyramid, the white Jamaican enters interracial relationships that may incite hybrid self-makings. What happens if the white girl chooses black womanhood as the ideal she fantasizes, desires, internalizes; if the erotics of self-making makes her in the image of the black woman […]?" (78).

[43] Tinsley makes this argument specifically through a reading of *Luminous Isle* by the white queer creole Jamaican novelist Eliot Bliss. While Tinsley's reading pertains specifically to this novel, set in Jamaica, Bliss was acquainted with Rhys and the two found commonality in their experiences as white creole West Indian women in Britain. In addition to the personal connections between the two novelists, their writings emerge from the geographical and colonial overlap of the British West Indies.

Rhys' rejection of reproductive futurity works specifically *through* the projection of a fantasy of identification with Black femininity. In her memoir *Smile Please*, Rhys portrays her relationship with her childhood friend, Francine (who she appears to have named the character in *Voyage* after), in similar terms:

> Years later I made great friends with a negro girl called Francine. I've written about her before. […] I grew very fond of Francine and admired her; when she disappeared without a word to me I was hurt. People did disappear, they went to one of the other islands, but not without saying goodbye. I still think of Francine and now I can imagine other reasons for her complete disappearance from the house and from my life. (31)

Calling Francine a "great friend" places her in a position of symmetry, as opposed to the asymmetrical relation to a domestic worker (it is unclear from Rhys's memoir whether her "friend" Francine was also a domestic worker employed by her family). This original impossibility of achieving a desired intimacy with Francine seems to echo throughout each nostalgic evocation of Black femininity across her writing as a site of absence ("complete disappearance") inflected by longing.

Smile Please states a repeated desire to identify the white self with Blackness that echoes Anna's projections in *Voyage in the Dark*. While this desire is indicated through an aesthetic attraction to Blackness that stems from Rhys's stated need to be similarly desired by her mother,[44] Rhys indicates that this desire also functions as a seeking of an outside to the compulsory heterosexuality of elite white Dominican society:

> Also there wasn't for [Black women], as there was for us, what I thought of as the worry of getting married. In those days a girl was supposed to marry, it was your mission in life, you were a failure if you didn't. It was a terrible thing to be an old maid, on the shelf as they put it. The fact that I knew several old maids who seemed perfectly happy, indeed happier and livelier than the married women, didn't affect the question at all. I dreaded

[44] Rhys writes that her mother "loved babies, any babies. Once I heard her say that black babies were prettier than the white ones. Was this the reason why I prayed so ardently to be black, and would run to the looking-glass in the morning to see if the miracle had happened? And though it never had, I tried again. Dear god, let me be black." (*Smile* 42)

> growing up. I dreaded the time when I would have to worry about how many proposals I had, what if I didn't have a proposal? This was never told me but it was in every book I read, in people's faces and the way they talked.
>
> Black girls on the contrary seemed to be perfectly free. Children swarmed but negro marriages that I knew of seemed comparatively rare. Marriage didn't seem a duty with them as it was with us.
>
> All this perhaps was part of my envy which rose to a fever pitch at carnival time. (51)

This passage lacks a critical analysis of racial gendered structures that would consider the ways in which working class Black women were already excluded from the marriage economy of white creole society and ways in which colonial power structures constructed Black women as domestic workers or mistresses, but not wives. Rhys's stated desire to be like Black women by not facing the obligation to marry (although posited from a child's perspective and lacking in an adult reflectiveness) demonstrates a search for an outside to compulsory heterosexuality and reproductive futurity.[45] This passage evidently ignores the biopolitical control that has been enacted upon Black women's bodies through structures of imperial domination and state maintenance (ranging from the sexual abuse of enslaved women to reproduce the structure of slavery to later twentieth century forced sterilization of women of color by the imperial state).[46]

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[45] Anne Cunningham reads this passage in *Smile Please* as an instantiation of what she terms "negative femininity" in Rhys's writing, which presents an alternative to normative white femininity that supports the reproductive futurity required to perpetuate the white imperial state: "Rhys's curious perception of black women's freedom from the duty of marriage reflects how black women were historically denied a position of subjectivity. Voyage in the Dark demonstrates how race complicates gender. Anna's wish to be black is born from a fear and disdain of the symbolic white patriarchal order. Although Anna dreads joining the ranks of white gendered femaleness, her whiteness circumscribes her options for resistance within this order. Thus, enacting a failed or negative white femininity serves as an alternative to accepting the colonial narrative." (Cunningham 379-80)

[46] For a historical overview of forced sterilization of women of color in the French Empire, see Françoise Vergès *La ventre des femmes* (2017), translated by Kaima L. Glover as *The Wombs of Woman: Race, Capital, Feminism* (Duke UP, 2020). While the forced sterilizations Vergès documents in this book occurred in the 1960s in Réunion, Vergès situates these instances in a longer history of biopolitical control over Black women's reproduction by the French state. Forced sterilization of women of color has been documented in other colonial instances, including in the United States. Published in 1981, Rhys would have written and revised *Smile Please* at the time during and after these sterilizations were happening, even if public knowledge of this was limited. My reading of Rhys implicitly references the relevancy of both French and British imperialism to her writing through her identification with "the Antilles," a term used more often in French to refer to the islands Guadeloupe and Martinique that are still part of the French DOM and are in close geographical proximity to Dominica.

Rhys's personal politics may be ambivalent, yet her writing reveals the ways in which a Creole modernist positioning is inevitably entangled with the reproductive biopolitical power structures that produce the racialized, colonial, and national subject. While there may be a queered or anticolonial impetus behind the white woman's desire to identify with Blackness, as Tinsley notes, this is not a desire with the potential to undo racial power structures:

> For the white woman "blackening" is always a choice for herself – a choice that draws on rather than forfeits race privilege – while for the black woman it never is; and this limitation to black-white identification cannot be underplayed. Finally, the erotics of self-making in color is an *auto*eroticism through which the white woman seeks the pleasure of producing herself differently, not an alloeroticism whose goal is mutual transformation (Tinsley 79)[47]

While Tinsley's theoretical focus is on same-sex eroticism between Caribbean women, her diagnosis of an (auto)erotics in a white woman's desire to identify with Black femininity is apt to an analysis of Rhys due to the ways in which the desire to be Black in Rhys's writing continually shifts into an eroticized desire for a (lost) intimacy with a Black feminine figure as the alternative to a deep dissatisfaction with white heterosexuality. As Tinsley states, these desires are "an erotics of the self" that allow only for the white woman's self-construction outside of colonial heterosexual power structures and are unable to envision Black women occupying the position of desiring subjects.

While Anna's evocations of a desire to be Black and her eroticization of the Black feminine figure are a choice, she also experiences her involuntary racialization that places her

[47] Due to Rhys's positioning as a colonial subject herself from her childhood experience of Dominica and her deploying of a misguided identification with Black woman in an effort to seek an outside to heteropatriarchal power, her identifications with Blackness are different from the minstrelsy of white modernist writers appropriating Blackness as an aesthetic to prop up their literary productions as described by Michael North in *The Dialect of Modernism.* Rhys's writing does not employ lengthy productions of racialized dialect, and as I will discuss, an influence of Creole linguistics in Rhys's text should not be seen as appropriation due to her lived experience as a West Indian. As Rhys is located outside of the United States specific history of minstrel performance, I believe a broader understanding of different contexts of cross-racial identification is necessary here. This is not by any means a move to locate Rhys outside of racial power structures, but rather to challenge the establishment of equivalence that applies a United States-based framework to other geopolitical situations.

outside of the privileged center of whiteness upon entry into the metropole of London. Although she occupies a privileged position as a white creole from an elite family in Dominica, in addition to loss of economic status due to her disinheritance by Hester, Anna experiences racialization and loss of racial privilege in the process of her migration to the metropole. As the voice of British imperialism in Dominica, Hester applies racializing discourses to Anna before she even leaves, beginning with the implication that Anna had mixed racial heritage:

> 'Unfortunate propensities,' she said. 'Unfortunate propensities which were obvious to me from the first. But considering everything you probably can't help them. I always pitied you. I always thought that considering everything you were much to be pitied.'
>
> I said, 'How do you mean, "considering everything"?'
>
> 'You know exactly what I mean, so don't pretend.'
>
> 'You're trying to make out that my mother was coloured," I said. 'You always did try to make that out. And she wasn't. (65)

In spite of Anna's repeated fantasies of Blackness, this passage demonstrates an unwillingness to forgo claim on the privileging status of whiteness through her insistence on her creole mother's racial purity. The "unfortunate propensities" that Hester is referring to are Uncle Bo's fathering of "illegitimate" biracial children with women of color. This passage thus evokes multiple instances of miscegenation as sites of deviant sexuality then passed onto Anna following the discourses of racial degeneracy that Hester implies. Specifically targeting Anna's intimacy with Francine, Hester then invokes discourses of racialization through the contamination of social contact: "'Impossible to get you away from the servants. That awful sing-song voice you had! […] Exactly like that dreadful girl Francine. When you were jabbering away together in the pantry, I never could tell which of you was speaking'" (65). In Hester's racist ideological framing, Anna is racialized as Black not only through exchange, but through symmetry with Francine. At first, Anna's Black sounding voice (her West Indian accent) is acquired through

talking with Francine, implying racialization through social contact. But as she continues to speak, embodying a West Indian geography through her voice, this contact becomes a sameness, "exactly like," with no sonic differentiation, "I never could tell which of you was speaking." In transporting her West Indian accent to London as an embodied reminder of Dominica, Anna additionally carries over this "Blackening" of the white self through the sonic qualities of her voice (for the inability to differentiate her voice from Francine's implies the transference of a quality that *exceeds* accent, for the voices of people who share a common accent can often be sonically differentiated).

The imposed racialization of Anna through association with Blackness occurs again as her foreign status in London coalesces with her position as a sex worker. In a key moment of instantiation of Anna's racialization, her friend and fellow chorus girl Maudie refers to her as "the Hottentot" when Anna first meets Walter Jefferies.[48] Maudie says, "She was born in a hot place. She was born in the West Indies or somewhere, weren't you, kid? The girls call her the Hottentot" (13). The homophonic resonance between "hot" and "Hottentot," which seems in part to justify the other chorus girls' application of this label to Anna, produces a racialized chain of association between tropical geographies and Blackness, importing the term "Hottentot" from a different site of European imperialism and exercise of colonial sexual violence upon the body

[48] Gregg makes the convincing claim that Anna is already instantiated as a sex worker from the beginning of her relationship with Walter (120). Indeed, the position of the chorus girl is already close to and ready to slip into that of the sex worker (the chorus girl relies on the economization of the male erotic gaze upon women's bodies and Rhys's novel suggests that some of the chorus girls did engage in sex work on the side). Critical readings of *Voyage in the Dark* have also noted the intertextual parallels drawn with Emile Zola's novel *Nana* (1880) which Anna is reading at the beginning of the novel, noting the similarity between the protagonists. Nana, whose given name is in fact Anna, moves from actress (a position similar to chorus girl) to sex worker and dies of smallpox (perhaps a transference of the fear of contamination of venereal disease that animates the figure of the sex worker). In an analysis of Rhys's frequent textual use of French, GoGwilt argues that the intertextuality of *Nana* encapsulated in Anna's name presents another moment of the slippage of French language (and thus Creole textuality) into the supposed English of Rhys's writing: "*Voyage in the Dark* provides perhaps the most economical Francophone English displacement of literary consciousness in the puzzle of its protagonist's name, Anna, whose claim on the reader's sense of narrative consciousness emerges from an anagram of the Zola novel *Nana*" (GoGwilt 115).

of a Black women.[49] The evocation of the "Hottentot" refers to the woman named Sarah Bartmann/Saartje Baartman, born in colonial South Africa, who in 1810 was coerced into traveling to Britain to be put on nude exhibition and then sent to Paris, where she continued to be displayed and forced to undergo anatomical examination. After her death in Paris, medical examiners performed extensive autopsies of her body with an obsessive focus on her sexual anatomy. All of this, of course, amounted to years of repeated sexual abuse. In an essay on the iconography of the "Hottentot Venus" often cited in the scholarship on *Voyage in the Dark* and in much of the scholarship on Baartman's representation in the European colonial imaginary, Sander Gilman argues that this figuration of Bartmann was ideologically linked to that of the (white) sex worker:

> In the course of the nineteenth century, the female Hottentot comes to represent the black female *in nuce*, and the prostitute to represent the sexualized woman. […] While the number of terms describing the various categories of the prostitute expanded substantially during the nineteenth century, all were used to label the sexualized woman. Likewise, while many groups of African blacks were known to Europeans in the nineteenth century, the Hottentot remained representative of the essence of the black, especially the black female. Both concepts fulfilled an iconographic function in the representation of the world. (206)[50]

[49] The term "Hottentot" was applied by European colonizers to the Khoikhoi/Khoekhoe, indigenous people in Southern Africa. The term is now considered offensive.

[50] Gilman also suggests that nineteenth-century anatomical studies of Black African women's genitalia that pathologized normal variations also associated these variations with the category of the lesbian (218), thus constructing Black femininity as categorically queer. In her study of French contexts of the representation of Sarah Bartmann, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting identifies the broader representational problems that occurs in Gilman's study of appropriating the Black female body to construct white femininity: "one never finds any details about the one major black female figure featured in the chapter, Sarah Bartmann, the Hottentot Venus. The literal photographic presence of the black female body and her genitalia are there expressly for a better understanding of (white) patriarchy's construction/fear of female sexuality (to be read as white female sexuality)" (3). While explicitly examining constructions of Black femininity as distinct from white femininity, Sharpley-Whiting's study still maintains the pitfall of interrogating these representations from the controlling structure of the white male gaze. In a queer reading of the Black Venus, we might ask then what would it mean to examine representations of Black femininity from the perspective of a desiring feminine gaze? With Rhys's writing, we are of course still within the ideological binds of the white European perspective in which desire and intimate association between Black women remains unthinkable. Sharpley-Whiting also updates the brief biography of Bartman that Gilman provides to emphasize the ways in which her categorization was determined by the categorizing gaze of colonial whiteness that erases her particularity as an individual person: "And even less is known about Sarah Bartmann the person; mystery surrounds her date of birth, her date of death, her racial/ethnic origins – was she a Hottentot (Khoihkhoi), a female Bushman (San), or a *sang-mêlé*? One can only speculate and approximate. […] Most nineteenth-century French

As with the textual intrusion of the figure of the enslaved women, for the figuration of the "Hottentot Venus," who was subjected to sexual violence for the systematic co-construction of European colonialism and racism and categorically denied personhood, there is no equivalence between the position of the white creole woman and this figuration of Black femininity. The reference to the "Hottentot Venus" does demonstrate the ways in which the white sex worker was produced as a deviant (ambiguously racialized and potentially queer) figure to be managed and controlled in the economy of the sexual biopolitics of empire. These moments in which Anna is cast out of the center of privileged whiteness despite her skin tone and her European genealogical heritage demonstrate the ways in which whiteness is a constructed category, carefully managed with little allowance for deviation or difference, that functions in the service of the biopolitical reproduction and perpetuation of the imperial state. This function of whiteness relies upon the maintenance of the white creole as improperly or incompletely white, along with the category of the prostitute, the queer, and the sexually "deviant."[51]

The "Left Bank" of the Island: Locating the Antilles in France

A further geographic superimposition of the creole Caribbean upon the colonial metropole occurs through the transposition of Anglophone Creole identity onto a French imperial geography in Rhys's short fiction set in Paris, published in *The Left Bank and Other Stories* in 1927. Rhys's complex evocations of geographical overlap allow the works in this volume to cross between alternate European metropoles (suggesting a degree of interchangeability between

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spectators did not view her as a person or even a human, but rather as a titillating curiosity, a collage of buttocks and genitalia." (17)

[51] A comparison could be made here to the ways in which certain European ethnic immigrant minorities were not initially classified as fully white in the nineteenth century United States. See, for example, *How the Irish Became White* by Noel Ignatiev (1995).

Paris, London, and Vienna) and infuse the continental European geography as well with the presence of Dominica. In the context of Paris, Dominica is metonymically linked to the colonial presence of the French Antilles. “Trio” is the only one of Rhys’s stories in this volume to feature Black French Antillean characters in the Parisian metropole, and their Antillean presence in Europe provokes the unnamed narrator’s longing for and identification with a Black French Antillean space. The “trio” in this story features two women and a man, the younger of the women is described as a “girl,”[52] “apparently about fifteen, but probably much younger” (83), who seems to be situated in an economy of sexual exploitation and exchange with the older woman and man. Rhys describes the “trio” through descriptors of skin tone, applying varying levels of racialization and proximity to whiteness in which the man’s skin is “coal black,” the older woman’s “coffee coloured,” and the younger woman possesses “evidently much white blood” (83).[53] The young woman thus imparts racial ambiguity associated with the figure of the creole, while the Blackness of the other two characters is emphatically racialized. Her ambiguous

[52] Following the lexical intrusion of French into Rhys’s texts, it is also worth noting that the French word for girl, “fille” is also used as a euphemism for sex worker.

[53] Sue Thomas interprets Rhys’s racialization of these characters’ skin tones as a form of exoticism aligned with the French Antillean genre of *doudousim*: “[Rhys] does not, though, undercut tropicalist stereotypes and types: the sexual precociousness of non-white girls and the identification of the skin shades of non-white characters through descriptors of resources extracted from the Caribbean (coal, coffee, and, with sweetie, sugar).” (146). Thomas reads “Trio” as Rhys’s positioning of her writing as in dialogue with Black French Antillean writers based in Paris in the 1920s and 30s through her evocation of the term “doudou,” which the older woman applies to the younger (Rhys *Left Bank* 85). Thomas argues, “The scope of Rhys’s interest in the *doudou* and doudouism (a manifestation of tropicality) demonstrates the proximity of her concerns and those of diasporic anti-colonial French Caribbean writers of the 1920s and 1930s. It reveals a complex site of regional and transatlantic translation and transculturation that crosses imperial and linguistic boundaries, speaking across French Antillean Creole, French, English, stylized West Indian patois, and in its relation to the music hall, Parisian argot and London cockney” (158). While Thomas’s consideration of this intertextuality with French Antillean modernism is interesting, Thomas’s argument lacks a specificity as to whether Rhys’s potential participation in *doudouism* would allow her writing to be read as in solidarity with French Antillean writers such as the Nardal sisters, who heavily condemned doudouist writing and the exoticization of Black women. For a more extensive discussion of *doudouism* and the disruptive potential for a feminine *doudouism*, see my previous chapter. In this case, however, I don’t view Rhys as participating in the specifics of this history and genre because this story doesn’t feature the environmental tropes of *doudouism* (comparing Antillean women to tropical flowers) and her writing doesn’t feature specific evocations of solidarity with French Antillean writers that would allow her to join in their critique.

racialization seems aligned with her implied positioning as a sex worker, as the description of her proximate whiteness leads into an eroticization of the sexual commodification of her beauty, which then results in the unidentified narrator's composite identification with and desiring gaze upon her:

> She had exactly the movements of a very graceful kitten, and he, appreciative, would stop eating to kiss her . . . long, lingering kisses, and, after each one she would look round the room as if to gather up a tribute of glances of admiration and envy – a lovely, vicious little thing. . . . From the Antilles, too. You cannot think what home-sickness descended over me. . . . (84)[54]

In "lingering" on the "kisses," syntactically reinforced through Rhys's repeated ellipses, the narrative also lingers on the eroticization of the Antillean woman's body. This passage indicates that this woman finds pleasure and desire in experiencing herself as eroticized, seeking "a tribute of glances of admiration and envy," which the narrative voice then participates in, mirroring back the desiring gaze imbued with mutual pleasure, calling her "a lovely, vicious little thing." This erotic exchange of the gaze leads to a positional mirroring in which the identity categories of Antillean woman and sex worker are then reflected upon the otherwise undescribed narrator. The woman being "From the Antilles too" leads to an inexpressible "home-sickness." The narrator identifies all three members of the "trio" as French Antillean, but only this woman provokes the specific longing of "home-sickness," implying a symmetry in positionality that goes beyond Antillean origin, perhaps due to her added eroticization as a sex worker.

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[54] Perhaps it is significant here that the comparison to the "kitten" evokes a similar language that Rhys later used to describe her textual production of *Voyage in the Dark*, "It's almost entirely in words of one syllable. Like a kitten mewing perhaps" (*Letters* 24, To Evelyn Scott, June 10, 1934). Rhys may have associated the "kitten" with the figure of the young female sex worker, and this letter indicates that in *Voyage* she may have attempted to translate this positionality into textual form.

This desiring and self-identifying gaze that the narrative projects upon the young woman enacts a queering spectacularization of Black femininity, as the narrator watches her perform for her male client:

> Suddenly she began to sing: *J'en ai marre*, to the huge delight of the coal black man who applauded vigorously.
> As she grew more excited she jumped up, swung her slim hips violently, rolled her eyes, stamped her feet, lifted her skirt. Obviously the red dress was her only garment, obviously too she was exquisite beneath it . . . supple, slender, a dancer from the Thousand and One Nights. . . .
> *J'en ai m-a-r-r-e.* (84)

The repeated and suspended titular lyric of her song, "*j'en ai marre*" enacts a sense of resistance or defiance of imposed order, for the French expression "j'en ai marre" translates to "I've had enough of it" or "I'm fed up." The French linguistic exchange that structures Rhys's Parisian writing suggests a further entry into mutual sexual exchange with the narrative self. In the young woman's becoming "excited," Rhys specifically chooses a term that is somewhat of a false cognate in French, with the French adjective *excitée* bearing the connotation of sexual arousal. The narrative then casts a desiring gaze upon the women's genitalia, noting the absence of underwear when she lifts her skirt: "obviously the red dress was her only garment" (84). The implied narrative gaze upon her nude body suggests an erotic desire: "obviously too she was exquisite beneath [her skirt]" (84). The description of the young woman's genitalia as "exquisite" enacts a highly sexualized spectacularization of her body put on display to generate the erotic gaze, in which she willingly participates. By providing the erotic gaze the young woman solicits, the narrator enters into the sexual exchange taking place.

To justify my reading of this passage as providing a queer erotic exchange, I will address two possible counterpoints: the lack of gendered identification of the narrative speaker and the presence of the heterosexualizing male gaze through the involvement of the male client in this

scene. While not explicitly gendered, the speaker seems to establish a specific self-identification with the figure of the young (racialized) female sex worker. Given the repeated centrality of similar figures in Rhys's writing as well as Rhys's repeated appeals to Black femininity to construct narrative possibility for a white female self, it is not a stretch to imagine a feminized narrative voice for this story. Furthermore, the male client's display of eroticism lacks mutuality with the young woman. While he is kissing her, she glances around in search of other desiring gazes (finding the narrator's). While she is ostensibly dancing for him, she seems to ignore his vigorous applause. She seems to produce this performance out of her *own* pleasure, with the provided lyric "*j'en ai marre*" reflecting her disregard. He is the only identified male figure in this story, and the older woman's concern for the *patronne* (the manager of the café, who is identified as female in the structure of French grammar) implies a female control and management of this space. Rather than the paying male client, the older woman seems to exert authority over the sexual exchange taking place, as she attempts to regulate the younger woman's performance (while mentioning the *patronne*): "Keep yourself quiet, Doudou." The term doudou, associated with the *doudouist* style in French Antillean writing,[55] is defined by the *Dictionnaire de l'académie française* as "Redoublement de l'adjectif *doux.* Terme familier et affectueux désignant une femme native des Antilles,"[56] whereas the *Trésor de la langue française* defines it as a regional term from the Antilles, an "Appellation tendre donnée à une femme."[57] Both entries categorize it as only grammatically feminine. This term is thus a signifier of intimacy, both symbolically and structurally equated with femininity and geographically tied to the French Antilles. While this term could be translated into English as "sweetie," the English

[55] See note 53.
[56] "Doubling of the adjective *doux* (sweet). Familiar and affectionate term for a woman native to the Antilles."
[57] "Tender appellation given to a woman."

term misses the Antillean geographical specificity as well as the unambiguous and insistent femininity "Doudou." The older woman's addressing the younger as "Doudou" thus instantiates an intimacy between the two that is grounded in femininity as well as their shared Antillean origins transposed into the space of Paris.

The final line of the story reinforces and repeats the speaker's Antillean identification by transposing an Antillean space onto the geography of the Parisian metropole: "It was because these were my compatriots that in that Montparnasse restaurant I remembered the Antilles" (85). The specificity of Rhys's citation of "Montparnasse," the region of Paris associated with Anglo-modernism, reinforces the geographical overlap of international transposition into the French metropolitan landscape while also instantiating a (French) Antillean presence in the formation of Anglo-modernity.[58] Multiple scholars have noted the linguistically creole potential of intrusions of French (and Creole language) into Rhys's texts. GoGwilt, for example, reads Rhys's linguistic influences as a form of textual creolization(/créolité) that marks the difference of her English linguistics, and for him defines Rhys's participation in "Creole Modernism":

> Here, of course, the "English" is underwritten by a French patois, and that Creole perspective written into the Francophone English of the narrative discourse becomes inextricable from the recurrent memories of Anna Morgan's West Indian past. […] Anchored in the thematic of racial identification—Anna's disavowal of whiteness—this Creole perspective, embedded in the experience of another's relation to English forms the linguistic trace of an anterior Creole cultural identity and identification. (117)

Ania Spyra reads Rhys's linguistic pluralism as a tool for deconstructing national identity and geographic and linguistic boundaries of belonging:

> Like many texts written by transnational migrants, *Voyage in the Dark* adopts an experimental multilingual form that includes untranslated Welsh, French, French patois, as well as several varieties of English: West Indian, King's, and cockney. Attention paid to these instances of foreign and accented language in the novel points to new foci within

[58] The Orientalist allusion to "the Thousand and One Nights" during the description of the young woman's dancing produces a further ethnic and geographical displacement onto an alternate imperial context.

> the text; multilingualism here not only mimics the linguistic diversity of Dominica, where the protagonist grew up, but also forces languages to coexist comparatively. The novel's preoccupation with language and accent leads to a critique of the idea of linguistic ownership that depends on standards and discernment in any comparative situation. (67)

Juliette Taylor-Batty argues for a French inflection of Rhys's English that works affectively and through the inadequacy of translation:

> In her representation of a cosmopolitan Paris, Rhys uses French to unsettle English, to create a 'feeling' within the language that is appropriate to her displaced, peripatetic and often polyglot characters. Such bilingualism is closely intertwined with Rhys's own work as a translator to such an extent that, in her earliest work, translation becomes part of the compositional process, and at times shades imperceptibly into fiction, challenging the very boundaries between translation, adaptation, and original composition. (81)[59]

In extending these scholars' arguments about Rhys's Creole/French inflected linguistics, I emphasize the extent to which Rhys's use of French is located in a Creole Caribbean context. As her story "Trio" would suggest, a European French geography is mediated by a prior identification with a French Antillean geography, with the Black French Antillean characters being identified as "compatriots" over and against Rhys's white female protagonist perpetual foreignness in Europe (a theme continued in her Parisian fiction). The geography of Dominica is thus also encapsulated in Rhys's references to the French Antilles, for Dominica is situated in close geographical proximity to Guadeloupe and Martinique and shares a history of French colonization prior to being established as a British colony in 1805.

Rhys's evocations of Dominican Creole (also called Patois, a French-based Creole language) and Standard French index one another. Rhys's original ending of *Voyage in the Dark*

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[59] Rhys authored two published translations of French books into English. Rhys translated the novel *Perversité* (1925) by Francis Carco as *Perversity* (1928). The publisher mistakenly attributed the translation to Ford Madox Ford who had helped Rhys secure the contract. She later translated her ex-husband Jean Lenglet's memoir *Sous Les Verrous* (1933, authored under Lenglet's penname Édouard de Nève). Rhys's translation of the book as *Barred* was published first in 1932.

includes a scene where Anna sings a creole song (evoking her mother's death) that Hester condemns as nonsense:

> The song went
> Ma belle ka di maman li
> Petit ke vini gros
> I can play that tune on the piano
>
> […]
> But that one's very melancholy Hester said and the words don't seem to me to make any sense.
> I said it means My beautiful girl is singing to her mother   The little ones grow old The little ones [grow] old (382)

Rhys's transcription of Dominican Creole language contains recognizable French words ("belle," "maman," "petit," "gros") while still requiring Anna's translation for the non-Creole speaking reader.[60] Hester's dismissal of the Creole meaning of this song illustrates a broader function of the non-English inflections of Creole and French in Rhys's text to disrupt translation, equivalence, and systems of legibility. Creole language thus carries with it a resistant potential to evade colonialist classification. While Standard French would have been substantially more legible to Rhys's European readers, its prior mediation by a French Antillean Creole linguistic past in Rhys's writing remains encoded through the language's suggestion of alternative geographical possibility.

Another story in *Left Bank* that blends a queer feminine erotic potential with geographical overlap is "La Grosse Fifi," set at a hotel in the French Riviera. In this story, Rhys extensively uses French language (including in the title) through the French-speaking character of Fifi who

[60] There seems to be a shift in meaning with the word "gros," meaning fat in French, as opposed to growing up, which would be encapsulated instead by the adjective "grand." As a non-speaker of Creole languages, I'm not able to evaluate the accuracy of Rhys's transcription or translation of this song, however it is interesting to note the lack of absolute equivalence in meaning of French loan words.

encourages the protagonist Roseau to find emotional expression through French poetry.[61] The novel begins with fellow English traveler Mark gazing upon "the sea" and in the next sentence, "Roseau turned her head to consider the smooth Mediterranean" (165), Rhys establishes a metaphorical superimposition of the Caribbean upon the Mediterranean, implying a simultaneity of the two geographically disparate seas. Roseau, while seemingly a non-French English speaker, provides Mark with justification for her name through the translation of French into English:

> 'I love your name anyway,' he said, changing the conversation abruptly – 'It suits you.' 'Yes, it suits me – It means a reed,' said Roseau. She had a queer smile – a little sideways smile. Mark wasn't quite sure that he liked it – 'A reed shaken by the wind – That's my motto, that is – […].' (169)

Roseau is, of course, not a common first name in French or in English, but in addition to being the French term for "reed," it is the name of the capital of Dominica. Rhys's refusal to name Dominica in her reference parallels her textual elision of the island's name from *Voyage in the Dark*. Roseau's translation of her name as "a reed shaken by the wind" invokes the mobility of the wind alongside an experienced prior suffering that is later revealed through Roseau's sobbing. Like the presence of Dominica, the exact cause of Roseau's sobbing is absent from the narrative. Roseau's "queer" smile that unsettles Mark is significant through the disruptive evocations of the word "queer" as counter-normative.[62] In this case Roseau's queerness seems to be heightened through her foreignness (though her nationality is not specifically defined, her name points to a potentially Dominican identity). As Roseau's "queer smile" relates to her name, and thus construction of categorical identification, the way in which her deviation from the normative troubles Mark indicates a disruptive potential.

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[61] The French poetry Rhys quotes, while uncited, seems to be from *Le Livre pour toi* (1907) by Marguerite Burnat-Provins. The novel's title translates as "Fat Fifi," and, as I will further discuss, Fifi's erotically charged bodily presence is referenced throughout the text.
[62] See note 35.

Mark is unsettled by Roseau's evocations of disruptive sexuality, which seems also to be aligned with her "queer"-ness, coalescing around Fifi. After discussing Roseau's name, Mark immediately leaves, with the implication that he has been shocked by her previous frankness about sexuality. The "abruptly" redirected conversation turns towards Roseau's name seems to have resulted from Roseau's prior confession that she can hear Fifi having sex with her lover next door. She casually describes her intimate knowledge of Fifi's sexuality to Mark: "Don't you know what a gigolo is? They exist in London, I assure you. She keeps him – he makes love to her, I know all about it because their room's next to mine" (168). Rhys's text provides continual reminders of the intimate porosity of the door separating Roseau and Fifi's rooms. Fifi begins an intimate friendship with Roseau when she hears Roseau sobbing through the door and rushes to comfort her. Rhys describes Fifi's entrance in somewhat erotic terms as the two women are only partially dressed. Fifi's frequently referenced corporeality is somewhat spectacularized: "It was Fifi. She was wonderfully garbed in a transparent night-gown of a vivid rose colour trimmed with yellow lace. Over this she had hastily thrown a dirty dressing-gown, knotting the sleeves around her neck" (173). The erotics of dressing/undressing continues between the two women (echoing back to the prior moment in "Trio" where the woman's lifted skirt reveals her nude genitals) as Fifi asks Roseau, "Where is your *chemise de nuit*?" (nightgown) and then helps her undress: "She took it from the chair close by, looked rapidly with a calculating eye at the lace on it, then put a firm hand on Roseau's skirt to help her with the process of undressing" (174). The "lace" of Roseau's nightgown upon which Fifi casts "calculating" gaze further hints at an erotics of covering and revealing. While partly described in maternal terms (due to the implied age difference between the women and Fifi's comforting care for Roseau), the intimacy between these women doubles this with erotic overtones as Fifi kisses Roseau:

> It seemed to Roseau the kindest, the most understanding kiss she had ever had, and comforted she watched Fifi sitting on the foot of the bed and wrap her flannel dressing-gown more closely round her. Mistily she imagined that she was a child again and that this was a large, protecting person who would sit there till she slept. (175)

While this kiss casts Fifi as a maternal figure through Roseau's imagining of herself as a "child," the excessive superlatives applied to this kiss ("kindest," "most understanding") imply an overdetermining representation in which this kiss cannot be compared to any prior experience of heterosexual intimacy. That this kiss provides the antidote to the problem of heterosexuality implied in Roseau's agreement with Fifi's question "It is naturally a man who makes you unhappy?" (175) further positions intimacy between women as an alternative to the problems of heterosexuality. The reminder of Fifi's bodily presence as "The bed creaked violently under the lady's weight" (175) hints at Roseau's prior intimate knowledge of Fifi from having heard Fifi with her lover.

The porous and erotically charged barrier of the door that separates the two women again allows for a potential queer encoding when Roseau overhears an argument between Fifi and her lover the next morning:

> Fifi, arguing, grumbling, finally weeping – the gigolo who had obviously just come in, protesting, becoming surly.
> '*Menteur*, *menteur*, you have been with a woman!'
> "I tell you no. You make ideas for yourself.' (178)

On a literal level, this scene is intended to reveal the pitfalls of heterosexuality as Fifi suspects her lover is cheating on her. Structurally, Fifi is introduced before her lover, implying that her dialogue occurs first, and the French term "*menteur*" (liar) is grammatically masculine, indicating that she levels this accusation at him. But the lack of pronouns specifying the dialogue and the reader's knowledge that it was in fact Fifi who spent the previous night with a woman (in Roseau's room) points to a double, queer encoded, potential reading of this passage. The reply of

“You make ideas for yourself” (with a grammatical awkwardness implying translation from French) suggests an autoeroticism in which fantasy and projection have the potential to supplant reality (to either positive or negative effect).

The queer encoding of this story extends back to Rhys’s textual evocation of Dominica with her repeated use of the term “rum” as an alternate signifier of queer textuality. While focusing more on the deviant racialization it implies in *Voyage in the Dark*, Ankhi Mukherjee implicates the connotative overlap between the terms “rum” and “queer.” Mukherjee cites the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition that establishes the two terms as synonyms: “Rum, its adjectival sense meaning both ‘fine,’ and according to the OED, slang for ‘odd, strange, queer. Also bad, spurious’” (30).[63] As various readers of Rhys have noted, the history of the alcoholic spirit “rum” is deeply connected to the Caribbean slave plantation in which the sugar used to produce rum was the primary crop, and rum today remains a significant export from the region. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Walter applies this term to Anna, saying “You’re a rum little devil, aren’t you?” to which she responds, “Oh, I always was rum […]. When I was a kid I wanted to be black […]” (*Voyage* 52). Anna’s self-identification with the term “rum” thus indexes her desiring projections onto Blackness, indicating these anti-normative desires are experienced as a queering of the self.

In “La Grosse Fifi,” “rum” isn’t associated with interracial desire, but rather with the encapsulation of space of the hotel and Roseau’s intimate desire for Fifi. The French Riviera hotel where Roseau and the others are staying is first labeled as a “rum” space, which casts it as deviant in the sense that Roseau has already lingered too long. Roseau tells Mark, “you’re right. My hotel is a rum place,” and his response emphasizes the hotel’s encapsulation of this term:

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[63] Gogwilt cites Rhys’s extensive use of the term “rum” as a British colloquialism that, when combined with her use of French and Creole Language results in a textual creolization of her writing (84).

"'Rum is a good word,' said Mark Olsen. You really oughtn't to stay here'" (184). When contemplating the possibility of leaving, Roseau realizes that her attachment to Fifi is what keeps her suspended in a "rum" space: "'I must be dotty,' said Roseau to herself. 'Of course I would go and like violently someone like that – I must be dotty'" (185). The repetition of "dotty" aligns this term with "rum" and therefore "queer" as an alternate signifier of the non-normative or strange, and specifically what makes Roseau "dotty" is her attachment to Fifi, figured as excessive through the term "violently." The nonnormative syntactical arrangement of this statement, "like violently someone" enacts a further textual queering, as though the word order were transferred from French, *aimer violemment quelqu'un*, where in this case the verb could precede the adverb. This indicates that Roseau is translating into English a thought previously figured in French in which, significantly, the verb *aimer* can mean both to like and to love. A broader spatial framing through feminine excess is produced through the equivalency of the hotel and Fifi, whose bodily excess is continuously referenced and instantiated in the title's labeling of her as "fat." The textual chain of associations "La Grosse Fifi" produces through the term "rum" as the overdetermined signifier thus implies a previous Caribbean location in Rhys's structuring of space that is also the site of counternormative or queer desire and structured through embodied feminine excess.

By reading the spatial production of Paris/France in Rhys's Parisian fiction alongside London in *Voyage in the Dark* we can see a broader equivalency in Rhys's structuring of the European metropole through the maintained presence of the West Indian periphery. This structuring occurs through the embodied presence of a queered creole femininity, indexed repeatedly through the figuration of Caribbean women's bodies, both Black and white. As with my argument regarding Francophone Antillean *doudouism*, the feminized narrative production of desire towards the

racialized creole woman enacts a queer affective space that while not always radical or revolutionary, is nevertheless nonnormative, regardless of the sexuality of the writer. This points to the disruptive potential of the feminine creole to breach imposed social orders in which heteronormativity and imperialism coincide to reproduce the white state, and thus the political impetus to the production of this figure as a feature of ambiguity and ambivalence in modernist stylistics.

CHAPTER FOUR

Claude McKay's Queer Creole Poetics

Claude McKay is well recognized as a prominent figure of Black internationalism. McKay is known for his involvement in the Harlem Renaissance, his transnational collaborations in socialist circles headed by Max Eastman in New York and Sylvia Pankhurst in London, plus a period spent in the Soviet Union as a delegate for the Communist International, his time in Marseille, where he wrote about international communities of Black sailors and sex workers situated at France's principal port, and his residence in Morocco until visa troubles with the British government (related to his Communist past) forced him to return to the United States in permanent exile from his native Jamaica.[1] While readings of McKay's works emphasize his internationalism or his status in American literature and the Harlem Renaissance, there is less scholarship that centers his Jamaican Creole identity and how this has informed McKay's writing over the course of his career.[2] McKay's literary career, in fact, began in Jamaica with two volumes of poetry, *Songs of Jamaica* (1912) and *Constab Ballads* (1912), published before he had ever left the island. These volumes feature poetry written in Jamaican Creole dialect and are deeply informed by McKay's experiences as a Jamaican. While McKay would leave Jamaica in 1912, the year of his literary debut, and never return, his later fictional writings, the novel *Banana Bottom* (1933) and the collection of short stories *Gingertown* (1932), would enact a trip home to a Jamaican setting, demonstrating that while permanently expatriated, McKay remained connected to the imagined space of Jamaica throughout his career.

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[1] McKay's most famous works that situate him as a contributor to the Harlem Renaissance include his volumes of poetry *Spring in New Hampshire* (1920) and *Harlem Shadows* (1922) as well as his novel *Home to Harlem* (1928). As a Black internationalist, he is best known for his novel *Banjo* (1929) set in Marseille, which depicts a transnational community of Black sailors from the US, the Caribbean, and African colonies.

[2] Notable scholars who have situated McKay in a specifically Jamaican and Anglophone Caribbean context include Winston James, Lee Jenkins, and Heather Hathaway.

McKay's later poetry, published after his time in Harlem, is mainly written in Standard English, indicating the particularity of his early experiments with dialect poetics to the linguistic space of Jamaican Creole. His later returns to dialect writing occurred primarily through dialogue in his fiction. Dialect writing, and poetry, especially, has a long tradition in US literature that is complicated by the particularities of US racial politics.[3] While scholarship on US dialect poetics is certainly relevant, I re-situate my reading of McKay's Creole poetics in a Jamaican context, where the political impetus of the poeticization of spoken language does not entirely correspond to the specificities of the US context. McKay's choice to poeticize Jamaican Creole was significant and a breach of literary norms that privileged "Standard English" as the language of literary and intellectual pursuit. Both *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* maintain the link between poetry and orality by labelling the poems as songs or ballads (which are traditionally sung). They also maintain this link to the phonetic emphasis of McKay's writing in Jamaican Creole by spelling words as they are pronounced and potentially obfuscating meanings for a British audience that was not familiar with Jamaican Creole. In addition, it is significant that these volumes together feature a sequence of love poems addressed to Bennie that reveal queer intimacy between Bennie and a male speaker. Several other poems express sexual desire and experience from the first-person point of view of unnamed speakers whose gender is ambiguous, textually obscured, and in some cases feminized.[4] Claude McKay's Creole poetics is thus both

[3] See particularly Gavin Jones *Strange Talk* and Nadia Nurhussein's *Rhetorics of Literacy* on writing in dialect in the American literary tradition. See also my discussion of Paul Laurence Dunbar's dialect poetry and writing in Louisiana Creole dialect in late 19th century US literature in Chapter One of my dissertation.

[4] In spite of the multiple subject positions McKay's poems occupy, due to Walter Jekyll's preface emphasizing the authenticity of McKay's voice as a Black Jamaican (and also the autobiographical framing of *Constab Ballads*) Nadia Nurhussain argues that "readers are thus instructed to think of all of the characters presented in *Songs of Jamaica,* male and female, young and old, to be versions of McKay" (194). While the equivalence between the poetic voice and McKay's own subject position is not always explicit, the possibility of identification with feminine and ungendered voices enacts a mutability of gender and disarticulates gender from other expressions of subjectivity.

feminized in terms of grammar and language and queered through the obfuscation of transparent narrative meanings that is combined with the suggestion of discordant sexuality.

McKay's early poems in *Songs of Jamaica* and *The Constab Ballads* are mediated through McKay's mentorship by Walter Jekyll. Jekyll was a much older white, aristocratic, queer British poet who took up residence in Jamaica and collected and published Afro-Caribbean folklore[5]. Jekyll also seems to have exercised a degree of editorial control over McKay's first publications. Many of the footnotes translating Jamaican Creole expressions into British English have been attributed to Jekyll, and Jekyll's preface to *Songs of Jamaica* positions McKay as a representative Jamaican poet for a British audience. There is some debate as to what extent Jekyll exercised a controlling influence as to McKay's linguistic choices in these poems, considering that McKay would never again write dialect poetry. However, when considering McKay's attention to the varied dialects of his Black diasporic characters in the dialogue of his later novels, writing in dialect seems more of a stylistic feature that McKay cultivated than an outside imposition. McKay's choice to limit his production of dialect poetry to Jamaican Creole could thus also be an intentional engagement with the linguistic particularities of Jamaica paired with a subsequent refusal to situate himself within the profoundly racialized and racist tradition of dialect poetry in the US. Gary Holcomb argues that Jekyll's editorial control was substantial and based on Jekyll's own racial eroticization of Jamaican Creole language:

> Jekyll discouraged his pupil from writing the sort of classically metered lyrics that, in a desire to be seen as a genuine poet, McKay wished to compose, and convinced him instead to write more of his "dialect" or, to be more precise, creole poetry. For Jekyll, the euphony of the Afro-Jamaican male voice vocalizing creole speech was a quality that could arouse what amounts to sexual stimulation, an aspect of the Jekyll-McKay relationship that deepens the meaning of interaction within the colonial contact zone. (76)

[5] Gary Holcomb describes Jekyll as "a British homosexual" who along with other queer aristocratic British men, "felt obliged to flee England during the late Victorian assault on "deviant" sexuality occasioned by Wilde's scandalous trials" (75).

While not ignoring the dynamics of racial power and differential access to literary prestige that inflected McKay's relationship with his mentor, there is also justification for reading McKay's Creole poetics as controlled by his own authorial voice.

Winston James provides an alternate view of this relationship, arguing that Jekyll was not the sole, controlling literary influence of McKay, but rather that "Jekyll, who befriended McKay, was an important but (contrary to the prevailing view) secondary figure in the young Jamaican's life" (*Becoming* 27). James continues, arguing that McKay's choice to write in Creole, in opposition to British linguistic colonialism, was "a revolutionary act" (*Becoming* 30).[6] My reading of McKay's Jamaican Creole lyric emphasizes his own authorship of these poems and the intentionality of his linguistic choices as an already skilled poet. To read McKay's poetic production through the racializing gaze of Jekyll's editorial control denies McKay artistic intentionality in his use of language and further racializes McKay as a projection of his white patrons' racial stereotypes, rather than a poet in his own right. Jekyll's promotion of McKay's work to a white British audience is relevant to my argument only in terms of how his characterization of Jamaican Creole language as feminine would have inflected and corroborated the gendered performance of McKay's verse. In his preface to *Songs of Jamaica*, Jekyll provides an intensely racialized account of the sonic qualities of Black Jamaican speech to a British audience that is clearly ignorant of Creole dialect:

> In its soft tones we have an expression of the languorous sweetness of the South: it is a feminine version of masculine English; pre-eminently a language of love, as all will feel

[6] In his biography *Claude McKay: The Making of a Black Bolshevik*, James expands on McKay's initial impetus to write in dialect poetry when he began his acquaintance with Jekyll, stating, "when one bears in mind the colonial milieu in which McKay grew up and lived, what is remarkable is not that he wrote all but one of the poems he showed to Jekyll in straight English, but that he wrote any at all in the language of the common people. Even more remarkable was that McKay had the added audacity to show the poem to a white man, a white aristocratic stranger no less, albeit one interested in Jamaican folklore" (52). James thus puts emphasis on the rebellious intentionality of McKay's poetic choices in using Creole language, rather than displacing credit for McKay's stylistics onto his white elite mentor.

> who, setting prejudice aside, will allow the charmingly naïve love-songs of this volume to make their due impression upon them.

This preface feminizes and infantilizes Black Jamaican speech as “charmingly naïve,” an act of racialization that denigrates the intellectual and artistic merit of Creole linguistic expression. While I recognize Jekyll’s racist paternalism, by separating his description of the femininity of Creole language from the racial imperialist politics that would cast the creole feminine as dependent and inferior, this chapter aims to interrogate the specific gender performance that McKay enacts in his Creole poems, and the extent to which McKay produces a queered feminized Creole poetics. In a culture in which femininity is automatically derogatory, it is not insignificant that gender is the shorthand for Jekyll’s racialization of McKay. In the context of Jekyll’s praise of McKay, femininity indexes queerness as well. Jekyll himself was likely queer, as was McKay. If their relationship never entered into sexual or romantic terms, it could at the least be considered a queer literary mentorship, for McKay specifically noted queer writers such as Oscar Wilde and Walt Whitman whom he read with Jekyll.[7] While sexuality is separate from gender, Jekyll’s eroticization of Black Jamaican men, whom he casts as feminine, does present a non-normative queering of masculine desire, eroticizing his fantasy of the feminization of Black Jamaican men who speak “a language of love.”

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[7] Holcombe, *Codename: Sasha*, 76. While some biographers have speculated that there may have been a sexual dimension to the relationship between McKay and Jekyll, Winston James dismisses this supposition due to lack of evidence apart from the queerness of both men. Gosciak sidesteps the issue of definitively addressing the question of sexual relations by framing the relationship as queer in social and cultural terms: “Their ‘special’ relationship, as Jekyll called it, was viewed as a unique mark of their Englishness and their own brand of high culture (decadence for instance, as well as horticulture and the vernacular). Jekyll understood, from his close relationship with Gertrude in the field of decorative arts, that homosexual bonding was to be encouraged as an expression of uniqueness. For both Jekyll and McKay, it was a discreet relationship that seemed a marriage of convenience held together by a shared rebelliousness against the status quo – the poet would also have his own rebellions against the black elite in Jamaica and the United States – and a shared love of languages. (McKay would see his later relationships through this rebellious sexuality, especially with Ogden in London, as more symbiotic, in contrast to his experience in the United States with Max Eastman, which was less sexual than predatory” (55-56). Gosciak’s framing of this queer literary exchange is more relevant to understanding the queer dimension of McKay’s poetics, which goes beyond his depictions of intimacy between men, and in my reading is a feature of his Creole language stylistics.

Creole Poetics and the Politics of Dialect

In McKay's poems the creole figure is not referred to as such but is implicitly the poetic voice who speaks in Creole language. In addition to clearly marking a Jamaican cultural context, McKay's linguistic choice calls forth the racialized body of the speaker; Jekyll's preface clearly instructs readers that this speaker is meant to be imagined as Black and feminine. The specificity of the racial and cultural identification of McKay's Creole lyric stands in contrast with the mutability of the gender of his poetic voice, which indicates that gender is the contested identity category throughout his Creole poems. The gendering of McKay's speaker is made transient through a constant drifting towards femininity – from Jekyll's introduction, to the several poems where the speaker marks herself as female, to the love poems addressed to men that obscure the speakers' gender at the outset only to alleviate a potential reader's anxiety over a disruption of heteronormativity through language that eventually casts the speaker as a woman writing to a man. Although marked by femininity, the gender of the poetic voice remains mutable and does not equate feminine performance with claims to womanhood, for the poetic voice returns to assertions of maleness, narrates desire for men and masculinity, and becomes a constable (who would have been read as male at the time of McKay's writing), acting as an autobiographical voice for McKay's critique of the racial policing he had become complicit in during his brief employment in Jamaica's police force.[8] The association of the Creole speaker with femininity

[8]Winston James contends that the prevalence of feminine voices McKay's writing is evidence of his feminist sympathies: "One of the most remarkable features of the poetry McKay wrote during his youth is the extraordinary degree to which the experience of Black Jamaican women is woven into the overall tapestry of his work. In fact, he wrote a substantial number of his poems in the female voice, and even more had women as their subject. […] In all his writing, his unforced, unpatronizing, but sympathetic portrayal of women, with their different desires and myriad struggles, is one of the most consistent motifs in McKay's work from beginning to end" (*Bolshevik* 135). My argument extends beyond James' reading of feminist sympathy to read these poems as engaging in a queered production of gender fluidity through the suggestion of the masculine poetic voice *becoming* feminine. While McKay was more extensively and directly involved in anti-racist and Communist politics than in feminism, he did have several friendships and professional collaborations with notable women writers, intellectuals, and activists, including Sylvia Pankhurst and Crystal Eastman, both prominent feminists.

does not rest upon an absolute claim to womanhood or even a fixed gender identification, but rather points to a queering of the stated gender categories while casting the expression of love and depiction of sex between Black men as an act of political resistance to British colonial law.

While McKay was one of the first to write in Jamaican Creole as opposed to Standard English, racialized dialect already had a long and contentious history in the United States, with Paul Laurence Dunbar serving as an important precedent for African American dialect poetry.[9] In his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, James Weldon Johnson provided a mixed assessment of the genre of African American dialect poetry most famously undertaken by Dunbar. Johnson indicates that his reservations are not with poetic experimentations with dialect in themselves, but the ways in which the white American audience had read and promoted this popular genre in order to reify a stereotyped and limited figure of the African American poet:

> Negro dialect is at present a medium that is not capable of giving expression to the varied conditions of Negro life in America, and much less is it capable of giving the fullest interpretation of Negro character and psychology. This is no indictment against the dialect as dialect, but against the mould of convention in which Negro dialect in the United States has been set. (xli) [10]

Michael North takes up Johnson's evaluation of the legacy of dialect poetry in *The Dialect of Modernism.* North takes McKay's Jamaican poems as a counterexample to the white modernists who appropriated black dialect for stylistic innovation, arguing that McKay's dialect poetry facilitated his own racial commodification for white British and American audiences:

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[9] See note 3, and also Chapter One.

[10] Johnson in fact praised McKay's Jamaican dialect poetry for its difference from African American dialect poetry and considered it among McKay's best work: "Mr. McKay's earliest work is unknown in this country. It consists of poems written and published in his native Jamaica. I was fortunate enough to run across this first volume, and I could not refrain from reproducing here one of the poems written in the West Indian Negro dialect. I have done this not only to illustrate the widest range of the poet's talent and to offer a comparison between the American and the West Indian dialects, but on account of the intrinsic worth of the poem itself. I was much tempted to introduce several more, in spite of the fact that they might require a glossary, because however greater work Mr. McKay may do he can never do anything more touching and charming than these poems in the Jamaica dialect" (xliii-xliv)

> It was vitally necessary to [McKay's] patrons and readers that he be "real" […] so that he could symbolize a nature that had escaped from the culture they found stifling. And yet that nature could only be defined and validated by white authority itself, which rigidly enforced its own standards of the natural as if sublimely aware of its contradiction. (103)[11]

North's reading of McKay's poetry tends to focus on the controlling editorial framing of McKay's white patrons, demonstrating how McKay's use of dialect reproduces the primitivist and racializing gaze of the white reader. This reading, however, fails to account for McKay's own artistic decisions, attributing his use of creole dialect solely to the controlling figure of Jekyll, rather than allowing for the intentional choices McKay made within the limitations of the financial need to appeal to white audiences. I argue that McKay's poetry is a resistant text precisely because it resists Jekyll's framing of ethnographic authenticity.[12] An appeal to "authenticity" does not appear to be McKay's intention considering his blending of vernacular language with archaic British expression and poetic meter that pushes back against the assumption that dialect produces the authentic sound and rhythm of speech.[13]

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[11] North argues that nonstandard language is always entangled with the standard, that "McKay's situation brings to the surface the subterranean connections between dialect and the standard, which need each other for definition, and perhaps the similar collusion between European culture and blackface rebellions against it" (123).

[12] In his preface, Jekyll attests to the authenticity of McKay's poetic voice, calling him "a Jamaican peasant of pure black blood," a claim that Nurhussein, for example, situates within the genre of slave narratives that were prefaced by authenticating claims from white writers (195). The inaccuracy of Jekyll's "authentication" however demonstrates the artifice behind such presentations because McKay was *not* a Jamaican peasant, but from a middle-class family with access to an elite colonial education and employment as a constable, a form of civil service rather than manual labor. Although McKay would later take on working-class labor as a porter and a sailor his education, literary success, and access to elite intellectual circles made the circumstances of his life distinct from that of the proletarian laboring class.

[13] While there is a radical dimension to McKay's choice to write in Jamaican Creole dialect, the ethnographic authenticity and political impetus of McKay's language is under debate. Winston James provides context for McKay's Creole language: "There are, however genuine problems with the language that McKay uses in some of his Jamaican poetry. The primary problem, however, is unevenness. Some of the poems are faithful to the language, others compromise it. The issue cannot be explained away by an invoked distinction between 'dialect' and 'nation language.' As linguists point out, there is a continuum between creole and standard English; people speak and write at different points on that continuum. One of the weaknesses in McKay's use of language is that he did not always hit the right point on the continuum for the personae of his poems. […] McKay may also have compromised linguistically because he was attempting to appeal simultaneously to an international, standard-English-speaking audience and a subaltern, working-class peasant domestic readership" (*Fierce* 142). Heather Hathaway provides a similarly critical assessment of the inaccuracies and inconsistencies in McKays production of an "authentic" Creole dialect: "Granted, dialect poetry can only sustain a given number of alterations from standard English per line in

A broader issue with the scholarship on dialect writing, going back to Johnson as a primary source on African American poetics, is that much of it is firmly anchored in a United States national context, often comparing McKay to African American poets (as Johnson does, followed by later scholars such as Michael North and Nadia Nurhussein). While a discussion of the broader tradition of dialect in Anglophone literature is certainly relevant, centering US racial and literary politics distorts the specifically Jamaican context of McKay's early poetry and misses the originality of McKay's decision to poeticize Jamaican Creole language (he was the first poet to do so). When resituated in a Caribbean context, a more appropriate comparison for McKay's poetics may be the Creole language poetry of French Antillean writers such as Drasta Houël or even the longer history of Haitian Creole writing.[14] Kamau Brathwaite provides a discussion of how an "authentic" Caribbean language must be adapted to the geographical specificity of its environment and how imposed Eurocentric linguistic models are entirely unsuited to the Caribbean ecological and cultural space. Brathwaite takes as illustrative of Eurocentric imperialism the continued reproduction of Shakespeare's iambic pentameter in English verse (later condemning McKay for engaging with the Shakespearean poetic form):

> But basically the pentameter remained, and it carries with it a certain kind of experience, which is not the experience of a hurricane. The hurricane does not roar in pentameter. And that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm that approximates the natural experience, the environmental experience. We have been trying to break out of the entire

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order for its meaning to remain clear for the reader. Nevertheless, McKay's linguistic irregularities, which do not occur in an identifiable system or pattern, combined with the structural inconsistencies which characterize much of the verse in *Songs of Jamaica*, force us to question whether he or Jekyll, as his guide, fully trust dialect to convey accurately the meaning the author hopes to express. This subtle invalidation of the vernacular, combined with the intrusion of McKay's more formal voice, results in an inconsistent and, in many respects, unconvincing volume of poetry" (37).

[14] See Chapter Two on Drasta Houël's poems written in Martinican Creole. While my dissertation does not address Haitian literature (partly due to the limitations of my lack of linguistic ability in Haitian Creole), Haitian writers such as Oswald Durand, who published the poem "Chouchoune" in Creole in 1884, have provided some of the earliest examples of Caribbean Creole language literature.

> pentametric model in the Caribbean and to move into a system that more closely and intimately approaches our own experience. (265)[15]

Entirely dismissing McKay's innovative Creole language poetics, Brathwaite devalues McKay's writing as "dialect" as opposed to what he terms "nation language," giving Creole an elevated status as *the* site of West Indian cultural production:

> Claude McKay's first two books of poetry (1912) written in Jamaica, are unique in that they are the first all-dialect collections from an anglophone Caribbean poet. They are, however *dialect* as distinct from *nation* because McKay allowed himself to be imprisoned in the pentameter; he did not let his language find its own parameters. (275)

While I disagree with Brathwaite's condemnation of McKay and provide my own reading of McKay's appropriation of Shakespearean stylistics in his poetry later on in this chapter, Brathwaite's contention that a Caribbean poetics requires an adaptation of the language to a different environment is important in understanding how a creole specificity can be captured in literary style. While it is true that "the hurricane does not roar in pentameter," it also does not

[15] Brathwaite provides the formal structures of Reggae and Calypso music as examples of "authentic" Caribbean linguistic form. He describes this form through the example of the Reggae song "Alaman Agundy" by Jamaican recording artist Big Youth (Manley Augustus Buchanan). Brathwaite states this song "begins with a scream […] followed by the bass-based reggae canter of downbeat on the first «syllable» of the first and second bars, followed by a syncopation on the third third, followed by full offbeat/downbeats in the fourth" (279). Brathwaite continues to describe a Calypso form following an alternative rhyme scheme, "creating a cluster of syllables and a counter point between voice and orchestra, between individual and community, within the formal notion of «call and response», which becomes typical or our nation in the revolution" (279-280). Although Brathwaite does not view McKay's poetics as engaging in a revolutionarily Caribbean formal reappropriation of the English (or rather Creole) language in similar terms, I argue that McKay's attempt to construct a Jamaican sonic poetic space through his stylization of Creole phonetics does in fact challenge Eurocentric sonic and environmental hegemonies. In his essay "Poetics in America," Charles Bernstein points out that Brathwaite's formulation of a Caribbean "nation language," while counter-hegemonic, can itself be prescriptive and reconstruct categories of the nation: "Brathwaite's nation language is as much a new standard to rally national spirit as it is a break from standardization. Any comparison of ideolectical and dialectical poetry must confront this obvious contradiction: dialect, understood as nation language, has a centripetal force, regrouping often denigrated and dispirited language practices around a common center; idiolect, in contrast, suggests a centrifugal force moving away from normative practices without necessarily replacing them with a new center of gravity, at least defined by self or group" (7). While drawing these distinctions, Bernstein seems to still categorize McKay's poetry as "dialect" rather than "ideolect." Rather than attempting to fit McKay's dialect/Creole poetics into a constructed sub-category, however, my intention is to challenge the construction of new prescriptive forms to replace the pentameter. The process of creolization means that the creole is always cast in relation to a colonial antecedent and its novelty is never a full rupture from imperial form. Rather than achieving a total breach of prior structure, McKay accomplishes something different but nonetheless revolutionary in creolizing the pentameter.

roar in any human linguistic form. I posit that McKay instead makes pentameter, or more broadly English verse, roar in Creole.[16]

Silvio Torres-Saillant reiterates and reformulates Brathwaite's essential argument that the hegemonic structures of European language are inadequately suited to the Caribbean space, and thus Caribbean poetics must adapt and reappropriate these imperial forms: "Whether writing in a standard European tongue or in a local Creole, the Caribbean literary artists face the challenge of rendering their language consonant with the Caribbean cosmos." (78) This process that Torres-Saillant terms "linguistic nativization," works through syncretism, or more aptly, a formal and stylistic creolization:

> Linguistic nativization, then, can take place not only through morphological modification of the signifier, to use a Saussurean term, but also through accentuating the uniqueness of the signified. A new rhythmical arrangement produced by the syncretic mixture of the sounds emanating from diverse cultural sources and the new substance, sociohistorically speaking, of the Caribbean world should add fuel to the furnace necessary to recast the languages of the Old World. European languages, we can say, are rendered new in the Caribbean, particularly in the hands of Caribbean writers who are in touch with the sociocultural specificity of their world. […] The newness of the substance, in other words, has the power to transform the very essence of the old European words being used. Caribbean poetics exhibits either a knowledge or an intuition of such a dynamic. (82)[17]

The "newness" that Torres-Saillant thus describes as the result of stylistic creolization that resists imperial European hegemonies also implies that the modernistic innovation perceived in a Creole poetics such as McKay's is a feature necessitated by the locatedness of the Caribbean and the inability of metropolitan colonial models to inhere in a creolized space. This process of

[16] Walt Hunter, in an analysis of McKay's poem "De Dog-Driver's Frien'" argues that McKay's Creole dialect is itself a creolization of Jamaican language and Standard English that then serves to creolize the metric forms of English poetry: "McKay creates a composite voice in which the Jamaican dialect and Standard English confront and play off one another. […] Here, the generally regular meter of alternating eight- and seven-syllable lines is conjoined with McKay's improvisations on top of it, making the relationship between Standard English and Jamaican patois complexly symbiotic" (575).

[17] While Torres-Saillant writes specifically about the Caribbean, this process of "linguistic nativization" could of course pertain to any (post)colonial society.

innovation suggests a spectrum that ranges from the innovation of new Creole languages in the Caribbean but also encompasses rhythmic and sonic adaptations of the "standard" European language to re-signify in the Caribbean space. While McKay's Creole poetics is overall comprehensible to speakers of Standard English, his phonetic modifications of the language work to produce a Creole sonic space that insists on a Jamaican locatedness in addition to presenting a dialect associated with Blackness as high poetic form.[18] This poetic gesture defamiliarizes spoken language for readers familiar with Jamaican Creole phonetics, rejects linguistic hierarchies that encode a white European cultural dominance, and innovatively creolizes *and* queers the structure of English poetics to construct a counter-hegemonic Jamaican space.

***Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*: Queer Creole Poetics and the Police**

In both *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*, McKay to develops a homosocial masculinity through figures of military force and colonial law: the soldier and the police officer, who both represent a masculinist legal power and the enforcement of British colonial order. While this representation might seem contrary to a queer politics enacted through the disruption of linguistic law and feminine expression, McKay queers these figures through his critique of

[18] While writing in dialect may entail an effort to encode meaning, and I have previously suggested that Drasta Houël uses Martinican Creole language to obscure the legibility of queerness in her poetry (see Chapter Two), it is important to note that McKay's use of dialect does not preserve hidden meanings from an elite white audience who speaks Standard English. Nurhussein cautions against the broader assumption that dialect writing served to transmit encoded meanings to the working-class speakers it purported to mimic simply due to the high degree of literacy required to interpret a non-standard phoneticized writing: "Because late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century dialect poetry is frequently about, and explicitly addresses, semi- and nonliterate people, they are presumed to be its intended audience. However, despite statements of poetics by dialect poets insisting that they see their dialect work as the mode of expression best suited to their role as poets of the people, the mode that allows them to write inclusively to literate and illiterate alike, dialect poetry actually excludes readers who cannot engage successfully with the complex oral and literate components of the verse. In effect, dialect writers' experiments distanced them from less competent readers and impeded direct communication." (11)

their exercise of power, which distances them from their violent associations and analogizes their breach of normative masculinity to the breaking down of colonial law. This masculinist homosociality recurs in McKay's later works such as *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* which feature Black internationalist communities of working-class men connected to networks of mass transit: Pullman porters and sailors, respectively.[19] Michelle Stephens defines the circuits of Black internationalism through a homosocial masculinist imaginary that McKay's writing illustrates:

> through an understanding of colonial space as a transatlantic or circumatlantic geography that included both the colony and its surrounding seas, we discover the subsequent imaging of a black transnational community as black men traveling in colonial space in a common state of desiring, desiring freedom, language, community—and each other. (14)[20]

As Stephens suggests, this homosociality of men desiring drifts into the queer, especially for McKay who intentionally constructs the homosocial as an erotic space. This problematic leads Stephens to ask, "does the colony become primarily a space of men desiring?" (14). Stephens' analysis, in fact, suggests that desiring the colony, in this homosocial masculinist imaginary, runs

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[19] The homosocial masculinist Black proletarian international communities that McKay depicts in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* have been widely recognized in the scholarship on McKay. For example, Thabiti Lewis argues that his characters in *Home to Harlem* "map out the divergent diasporic routes of the New Negro reality and Renaissance" to "reveal black space, place, and cultural production in the person of the 'common man'" (361-2). While continuing to argue that McKay's female characters are "either obstacles or pawns for masculine elevation and personal fulfillment" (369), Lewis notes that McKay's depiction of homosociality feminizes the male grouping: "But in an interesting gender twist, McKay explores the complex status of black community as masculine fraternity on the train via a moveable kitchen—a space traditionally considered the domain of women" (373). McKay's groupings of working-class Black men are furthermore frequently read as queer. For example, Holcombe argues that "*Home to Harlem* summons the queer black proletarian class laboring at the peripheries of society, yet the novel's most noteworthy accomplishment is to visualize the intellectual work of the black Trotskyist full-blown revolution as already taking place, in the form of *dreaming* queer black transformation" (92) and characterizes *Banjo* as "wage[ing] a queer black anarchist plot" (140). Newman follows up on Holcombe's queer reading of McKay to argue that in these same novels "McKay's queerness—best defined as his same-sex desire and the social practices through which it may have been channeled—informs and structures the social vision represented in his writing as well as the formal innovations that mark him as a modernist prose stylist." (167-85). Newman continues, casting McKay's depictions of homosocial Black internationalist communities as networks of queer cruising: "The cabarets, apartment, and bars where cruising takes place in the novel function as resources for finding sex *and* making visible a transnational black community that provides an alternative vision of racial uplift and global black consciousness" (171).

[20] See Chapter Two for my discussion of Stephens' argument about the masculinist imaginary of the *Négritude* movement in Francophone modernism.

parallel to desiring other men, and vice versa, implying a queerness to the construction of creole desire.[21] McKay's early poetry is notable in figuring this same queerness of men desiring within the homosociality of imperial national order: the colonial police force. Rather than a proletarian group of workers challenging imperial hegemony, queer desire thus unfolds amongst those who have been interpellated to uphold colonial law. Rather than representing this erotic homosociality as a masculinist project, per Stephens' argument, however, I argue that McKay's queer homosociality is deeply attached to femininized language and figures, even when the characters represented are male, and thus for McKay, the queer is projected through a deep investment in the feminine.

In McKay's constable poems, which feature a series of queer love poems addressed to "Bennie," another male constable, the queer cannot be assumed to be excluded from or resistant to formations of the national and colonial state, for it is precisely the homosocial operations of the police force that enables a (male and empowered) Black queer sociality to unfold while eliding state surveillance. Jasbir Puar's concept of homonationalism, by which "some homosexual subjects are complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to them" is illustrative of the ways in which a queer constabulary might operate harmoniously with the exercise of state power.[22] Puar demonstrates

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[21] In her analysis of the queer masculine kinship formations in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo,* Stephens argues that McKay's critique of heteronormative domesticity promotes a Black diasporic nationalism that is masculinist and exclusionary of women: "His experiments with a novel of black nationhood that could represent the special, fractured, and mobile nature of the black diasporic male community required the merging of black national and transnational impulses, a merging evident in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo: The Story Without A Plot*. In these two novels McKay tried to manage the contradictions of this twofold emerging, in black male "couplings" that embody different visions of home, movement, and ultimately black masculinity and sexuality. In order for transnational male protagonists to remain mobile, either within the nation or throughout the diaspora, they must forfeit a vision of home represented by women of color, domesticity, and heterosexuality. In McKay's later novel Banana Bottom, the writer returns to the Caribbean island as the original site of home through the narrative of a female protagonist's return to the home island and the Caribbean national romance. In Home to Harlem and Banjo, however, the black male heroes are left to move freely throughout the diaspora, unattached and undomesticated" (142).

[22] It is important to note that Puar elaborates a theory of homonationalism based on the specific cultural and historical circumstances of twenty first century US neo imperialism and the biopolitics of the "War on Terror,"

that the queer is not in itself synonymous with the revolutionary or the radical and that queerness can in fact be martialed in the opposite direction, in service of the state exercise of nationalistic and imperial biopower. Furthermore, normative (and homonationalistic) constructions of queerness can themselves become "regulatory regimes":

> But finally, queerness as transgression (which is one step ahead of resistance, which has now become a normative act) relies on a normative notion of deviance, always defined in relation to normativity, often universalizing. Thus deviance, despite its claims to freedom and individuality, is ironically cohered to and by regulatory regimes of queerness – through, not despite, any claims to transgression. (23)[23]

The capacity of the Jamaican police force to tolerate homosociality (if not overt homosexuality) as well as other iterations of taboo sexuality (such as officers frequenting sex workers, as McKay's writing suggests) illustrates the potential of the state to momentarily accommodate the queer in order to deploy violence against the racialized, feminized, impoverished, and otherwise excluded populations.[24] In assessing McKay's queer Creole poetics amidst the constabulary regime, I am not arguing that the queer and the creole are always revolutionary, nor am I suggesting that these aesthetics are accommodating of state power and an extension of colonial

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circumstances in some ways very different from early twentieth century British colonial rule in Jamaica. Puar specifically defines homonationalism through the operation of hegemonic discourses of "American exceptionalism" alongside US militarism that deploy a queer rhetoric to martial US state power, for example defining patriotism through language of "pride": "National recognition and inclusion, here signaled as the annexation of homosexual jargon, is contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary. At work in this dynamic is a form of sexual exceptionalism – the emergence of national homosexuality, what I term 'homonationalism' – that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire" (2).

[23] As Puar notes, there is still great risk, vulnerability, and subjection to state biopolitical control for queer subjects interpellated into homonationalist structures of inclusion as these structures are temporary and often perpetuate violence on both those who are included and excluded: "there is no organic unity or cohesion among homonationalisms; these are partial, fragmentary, uneven formations, implicated in the pendular momentum of inclusion and exclusion, some dissipating as quickly as they appear. Thus, the cost of being folded into life might be quite steep, both for the subjects who are interpellated by or aspire to the tight inclusiveness of homonormativity offered in this moment, and for those who decline or are declined entry due to the undesireability of their race, ethnicity, religion, class, national origin, age, or bodily ability" (10).

[24] For example, McKay's poem "Pay-Day" in *Songs of Jamaica* suggests that it was common practice for the police officers to immediately spend their earnings on hiring sex workers once their wages were paid. McKay describes a "midnight girl" (41) watching the officers lining up for pay and proclaims, "Dere's no better time for her / Dan a policeman pay-day" (55-56).

hegemony. Rather I aim to read McKay's poetics as reflecting the ambiguity and ambivalence of his position as a queer Black constable and suggest that this ambivalence gestures towards an outside or alternative in resistance to the binary and classificatory logic of the colonial legal order.

The poems "My Pretty Dan" and "My Soldier Lad" in *Songs of Jamaica* can be taken as companion poems because, despite the interchange of a policeman in the first for a soldier in the second (both masculinized figures of law and violence), the feminine identified speaker (whose gender is not clearly stated) uses a similar linguistic repertoire to eroticize and feminize these stereotypically masculinist figures.[25] "My Pretty Dan" begins with a straightforward declaration of love for "a policeman" (1) and then moves to a feminizing and diminutive description of Dan: "My little bobby is a darling one / An' he's de prettiest you could set eyes 'pon." (5-6). While "bobby" is a recognizable nickname for a police officer, it is also, significantly a traditionally male name, as well as a diminutive version, making Dan seem childlike. This association is furthered by terms such as "darling" and "pretty" which are stereotypically associated with femininity, naïveté, and infancy. But this portrait of "Pretty Dan" does not minimize the violence of his occupation (although the speaker avoids direct discussion of this). The speaker continues, "He wears a truncheon an' a handcuff case, / An' pretty cap to match his pretty face." (15-16). Interspersed with Dan's prettiness is an indication of the symbolic violence of his police officer's uniform: the truncheon, a police officer's club that is both a weapon and symbol of the violent power enacted by the police force, the handcuffs, an implement of imprisonment, and the cap, a

[25] While nothing in "My Pretty Dan" actually identifies the speaker's gender as female, this is suggested only by the poem "Disillusioned" in *Constab Ballads*, which an "Author's Note" labels the "sequel to 'My Pretty Dan' in *Songs of Jamaica*." "Disillusioned" addresses Dan after he has left the speaker, now pregnant, for another woman: "Will you leave me all forlorn / To' de lilly baby's born?" (37-38). The speaker continues to warn of the broader danger that the police present to women: "Foolish, foolish young gals who / T'ink a constab could be true! / Foolish, foolish every one / Who will trus' a policeman!" (41-44).

symbol of the authority behind the police uniform. While the speaker claims they "could not give against a policeman" (19), with "give against" meaning "vilify," according to the footnote, the image of Dan wielding a truncheon indicates the ever-present violence of his position. "Pretty Dan" is written in rhyming couplets of iambic pentameter, the form of the "heroic couplet" that Shakespeare is known for, yet the subject matter of the "pretty" policeman suggests that this poetic elevation is meant ironically. Bernstein posits that McKay's use of pentameter more broadly bears an element of irony in its incongruity:

> In McKay's Jamaica poems, iambic pentameter is made the metrical mark of colonialism, the chains around a corrosive dialect. Pentameter is used to serve as the acoustic trappings of "old England,' yoked to a diffident creole, the weird ordinary of verse dialect. It is an oxymoronic form.

The oxymoron, as a figure of contradiction, can take on an ironic edge when the incongruities suggest the opposite of the elevation seemingly bestowed upon the subject. As "pretty" and "prettiest" are repeated several times in the poem (including the title), this excessive oversaturation of the term slips into a homophonic association with "petty," further diminishing the subject. McKay's pentameter further suggests a play with sound as the accenting of "póliceman" (1) provides the reader a phonetic guide to stress the first syllable to fit the iambic meter and "hear" the language through the sonic qualities of Jamaican English.

McKay's "My Soldier-Lad" enacts a similar feminizing diminishment of the masculinized violence that the soldier represents. The speaker infantilizes the soldier as a "precious pet" while implying an identification with femininity by positioning her relationship with the soldier as a source of jealousy from other women:

> My precious lilly pet,
> He plays a clarinet:
>   De gals dem envy me,
> But him they cannot get;
> Dem hate we both to see,

Me an' my precious pet. (25-30)

While the soldier is typically a figure of violence, this poem associates him more with the position of the "bandsman" (whose only implement is a "clarinet"). While not a ballad (because it does not follow the form of quatrains), "My Soldier-Lad" is nevertheless written as a song with a repeated chorus: "O my dear lilly soldier-lad, etc." indicated after each stanza. Referring to the soldier as a "pet," while a term of endearment, is also diminutive and dehumanizing (comparing the soldier to a domestic animal), as well as suggesting the speaker's ownership or possession. That "pet" rhymes with "clarinet" suggests a further diminishment in the domestication of a soldier, who instead of going to war, docilly plays music in a band. The line "De gals dem envy me" provides the only suggestion of the speaker's gender, which could be read as grouping herself with the other "gals," but it does not indicate with certainty that she is a woman. These poems thus present a queer poetics both through the feminization of the stereotypically masculinist figures of state violence, the policeman and the soldier, and through the ambiguous gendering of the poetic voice who conveys an adoration of these figures in diminutive feminine terms.

The language of "My Soldier-Lad" echoes "My Pretty Dan," for while the speaker addresses Dan as "Dear lilly p'liceman," in the repeated refrain of "My Soldier-Lad" the speaker similarly calls out, "O my dear lilly soldier-lad." McKay's use of "lilly" (a variation on lily) in both poems is another ambiguous, yet gendered signifier. The obvious association of lilies, as flowers, with femininity carries the same connotation of feminine diminishment as "pretty" and other associated adjectives. While French Antillean *doudouism* exoticized the feminine creole as a beautiful flower, McKay instead ascribes this floral imagery to male figures.[26] Additional

[26] See Chapter Two for a discussion of comparisons between women and tropical flowers in French Antillean *doudouist* aesthetics.

connotations of “lily,” however, imply a more complicated gendering and racialization of McKay’s figures. The *OED* indicates that “lily” functions as a derogatory term “to imply lack of masculinity” in a man, thus indexing queerness as gender non-normativity. Lily also carries a racializing connotation, implying “things of exceptional whiteness, fairness, or purity” (OED). While these poems could be read as suggestive of an interracial relationship, McKay complicates racialization by also implying that their subjects are Black men. The speaker calls Dan “prettiest of naygur,” a colloquial form of a racial slur. While this evocation of race could be read as offensive language, in the context of its usage by a Black poet, Winston James argues that this “is nothing less than a revolutionary phrase” because of McKay’s insistence on the beauty of Black skin (*Fierce* 131). In this case, McKay’s evocations of beauty, or rather “prettiness” are also feminizing and queering when applied to a soldier or policeman. In addition to presenting a revolutionary challenge to the racist colonial order, this phrasing is queer following Tinsley’s conception of the Queer Black Atlantic, that an expression of love and care towards a dark-skinned man ruptures the colonial logic of white heteroromantic poetry.[27] While the idealization these racialized militaristic figures could be read along the lines of a masculinist nationalist imagining that Stephens critiques in *Black Empire*, the feminized aesthetics of the language applied to these figures detaches them from violent action of law enforcement and places the emphasis on the speakers’ adoration of their loveliness. It is not merely the feminizing of the military and police that is subversive, but rather the poetic voice’s expression of a queer longing for a legal order that operates through the beauty and art of the “pretty” form and production of

[27] Tinsley defines the Queer Black Atlantic through the creation of deep intimate ties between captive slaves who were not supposed to feel: “During the Middle Passage, as colonial chronicles, oral tradition, and anthropological studies tell us, captive African women created erotic bonds with other women in the sex-segregated holds, and captive African men created bonds with other men. In so doing, they resisted the commodification of their bought and sold bodies by *feeling* and *feeling for* their co-occupants on these ships” (192). See also my discussion of Tinsley’s framing of the Queer Black Atlantic in my Introduction.

music rather than legal violence and privileges the expression of feminized desire over a masculinized nationalism typically associated with these figures.

While several of McKay's early poems give voice to a chorus of characters in urban Jamaica, including female sex workers and other working-class women entangled with the police (as do the poems discussed above), a significant portion of these poems construct a figure of the constable as a speaker. Although autobiographical, the constable speaker is also a poeticized voice and therefore hinges on a line between personal expression and literary construction. McKay's "Preface" to *Constab Ballads* begins by situating his poems as emanating from his experience as a constable, constructing the "I" of his verse as a poeticization of the self. McKay begins: "LET me confess it at once. I had not in me the stuff that goes to the making of a good constable; for I am so constituted that imagination outruns discretion, and it is my misfortune to have a most improper sympathy with wrong-doers." It is striking that McKay begins with a confession of his criminality (a "sympathy with wrong-doers") while positioning himself as a figure of the law (albeit reluctantly). While indicating his subversive attitudes towards policing, this confession also serves to mark his guilt in occupying the position of enforcing colonial law, which unjustly targeted the impoverished Black Jamaicans with whom McKay identified. McKay's preface at once situates the constable speaker as a poetic construction of the self and admits the literary license of his poetics as his "imagination outruns discretion." McKay thus posits the constable as an unreliable narrator of his confessions, a constructed voice that can slip into a sympathetic identification with the "wrong-doers" to the extent of taking on their voices to condemn the police. At the same time, McKay attests to the authenticity of this poetic construct of the self by inscribing his verse within the narrative genre of a criminal confession.

McKay's queered Creole poetics is perhaps most evident in his poems that are more explicitly queer, the sequence of love poems addressed to Bennie that bridge *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*.[28] The Bennie poems narrate an explicitly homoerotic relationship between Bennie and McKay's constable speaker which has ended with Bennie's departure and seems to be unsanctioned by the Constabulary where it unfolds. The first of these poems, "To Bennie (In Answer to a Letter)" is written primarily in Standard English, emphasizing a brisk formality following Bennie's departure from the speaker, in contrast to McKay's Creole language poems. This excessively formal tone is enhanced by McKay's use of antiquated expressions such as "Naught" (9) and "'tis" (6). At twelve lines, it is substantially shorter than the other Bennie poems, emphasizing an abrupt distancing, then reversed by the speaker's declaration of love in the final stanza: "Dearly I love you, shall love you for ever;" (10). The opening address of Bennie as "dearest comrade" (1) is again repeated in "Bennie's Departure," as the speaker refers to Bennie as "Dear little comrade o' lecture an' drill, / Loved comrade, like me of true stubborn will:" (203-4), and again in "Consolation" as the speaker recalls meeting Bennie for the first time: "A comrade came an' sat by me, / Restin' a hand upon my knee;" (29-30). The repetition of "comrade" across these poems evokes the revolutionary lexicon of Marxism and emphasizes the symmetry of Bennie and the speaker's social position.[29] According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "comrade" has its origins in the homosocial context of soldiers, meaning

[28] What I will from now on refer to as the Bennie poems are "To Bennie (In Answer to a Letter)" in *Songs of Jamaica* and "Bennie's Departure" and "Consolation" in *Constab Ballads*.

[29] While McKay did not become involved in Communist politics until after his move to the US, Winston James situates the origins of his politics with his sympathies for Fabian socialism (a more moderate socialist movement) which he shared with a group of Jamaican intellectuals and politicians at the time, notably his brother U. Theo: "U. Theo stood apart from his peers in another important way. Unlike most, he was a socialist. To be sure, he was not a revolutionary socialist, but he was to the left of the Fabians, for whom he nonetheless had great admiration. (Jamaica's governor, Sydney Olivier, and Annie Besant were two of the Fabian socialists he admired the most.) U. Theo was regarded by his contemporaries, including the Jamaican press, to be one of the most radical of his generation—and they were right" (James *Bolshevik* 38).

"One who shares the same room, a chamber-fellow, […] an associate in friendship, […] a close companion, mate, fellow." Usage of the term in a political sense by socialists and Communists dates at least from 1884. I posit that McKay uses this term in both its revolutionary political and militaristic homoerotic senses, suggesting a physically intimate companionship with Bennie that disrupts the work of policing. The positioning of Bennie as sitting next to the speaker, resting a hand upon his knee, produces a visual symmetry reflective of symmetrical power relations. McKay thus positions the queer Black love between Bennie and the speaker as a force of disruptive potential against the British colonial order. Although both Bennie and the speaker are constables, and thus enforcers of colonial law, McKay's poetic lingering over their queer love demonstrates the subversive power of the theft of time away from their job in violation of the law. Sex between men would have been criminalized in Jamaica under British colonial law, the same anti-sodomy laws that persist in Jamaica today as a vestige of colonial violence.[30]

Although McKay wrote his early poems from the position of working as a police constable and thus enforcing the laws and brutal punishments that he condemns in his poems, he made clear his disdain for policing in his introduction to *Constab Ballads.* This introduction indicates that for McKay, writing poetry condemning the actions of the police and reappropriating the constabulary as a space of queer erotic desire was an act of disruptive resistance to the racialized violence perpetuated by the police against the Black Jamaican working class:

> Moreover, I am, by temperament, unadaptive; by which I mean that it is not in me to conform cheerfully to uncongenial usages. We blacks are all somewhat impatient of discipline, and to the natural impatience of my race there was added, in my particular case, a peculiar sensitiveness which made certain forms of discipline irksome, and a

[30] See Chapter Three for further discussion of the criminalization of homosexuality (along with sex work and abortion) in Great Britain and the British Empire during this period.

> fierce hatred of injustice. Not that I ever openly rebelled; but the rebellion was in my heart and it was fomented by the inevitable rubs of daily life.[31]

By taking on the racist vocabulary that associates Blackness with stereotypes of criminality and unruliness: "We blacks are all somewhat impatient of discipline," McKay's preface thus claims a Black identity as a source of disruption that makes Black Jamaica unsuitable to the rule of law. For McKay, the "natural impatience" of Blackness is transformed from the derogatory stereotype of laziness to an intentional, resistant ungovernability. While McKay did not specifically advocate for Jamaican independence from British colonial rule, his "unadaptive" refusal to assimilate to the "forms of discipline" regimented by the legal system while himself a representative of colonial law enacts a revolutionary challenge to the legitimacy of the "injustice" of these laws. Rather than outright rebellion, McKay's poems provide a language of queer resistance that may not be legible to those in power, but they envision an alternative that contradicts the restrictive order of colonial law. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* Saidiya Hartman defines waywardness as a resistant practice of living that may be expressed through refusal to perform labor that replicates the restrictive social order and queer intimacies in addition to outright rebellion:

> Waywardness articulates the paradox of cramped creation, the entanglement of escape and confinement, flight and captivity. Wayward: to wander, to be unmoored, adrift, rambling, roving, cruising, strolling, and seeking. […] To strike, to riot, to refuse. To love what is not loved. To be lost to the world. It is the practice of the social otherwise, the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies; it is the lived experience of the enclosure and segregation, assembling and huddling together. It is the directionless search for a free territory; it is a practice of making and relation that enfolds within the policed boundaries of the dark ghetto; it is the mutual aid offered in the open-air prison. It is a queer resource of black survival. It is a *beautiful experiment* in how to live. (227-8)

[31] McKay's preface continues, stating "To relieve my feelings, I wrote poems, and into them I poured my heart in its various moods." McKay published *Constab Ballads* after he had already left the constabulary with the help of Walter Jekyll who secured McKay's release from duty (Holcomb 77-8).

While Hartman's definition of waywardness is particular to the historical context of Black women who were targeted through vagrancy laws in the post-Reconstruction United States, the "practice of the social otherwise, the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies" is also evident in McKay's queer, Creole poetics. Both the expression of queer intimacy and McKay's refusal of work for the constabulary (using police time to write resistant poems and potentially have sex with a "comrade" on the force, or at least imagine this possibility) stole away time from the productivity of colonial law enforcement and disrupted the efficient operation of the unjust disciplinary system. While being a part of the disciplinary system that punished the "wayward" Black sex workers and impoverished "vagrants" in urban Jamaica, McKay nevertheless enacts the resistant Black constable's own unruly wandering through Kingston and Spanish Town in which he finds sympathy with the sex workers and takes on their voices to condemn the police.[32]

Dwelling on the erotic comradery of the speaker and Bennie, McKay enacts a circumvention of police work that opens up, in Hartman's terms, "new possibilities and new vocabularies," including the linguistic possibilities offered by a queer Creole poetics. While queer sex is not a politics in itself, the poem "Bennie's Departure" emphasizes a queer revolutionary politics by making explicit the sex between men:

> Once his cot was next beside me,
>
>   But dere came misfortune's day
>
> When de pleasure was denied me,
>
>   For de sergeant moved him 'way:
>
> I played not fe mind de movin'
>
>   Though me heart wid grief be'n full;
>
> 'Twas but one kin' o' de provin'

[32] Significantly, McKay's poem "A Midnight Woman to the Bobby" is written in the voice of a sex worker who castigates the constable for joining the "buccra Police Force" (36) and claims that if he arrests her the judge will never sentence her without evidence: "Say wha'? -- 'res' me? -- you go to hell! / You t'ink Judge don't know unno well? / You t'ink him gwin' go sentance me / Widout a soul fe witness i'?" (41-44). See also Winston James' *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice* and *Claude McKay: The Making of a Black Bolshevik* for extended readings of this poem.

O'de ways o' dis ya wul'. (129-136)

The sergeant's obvious disapproval of Bennie and the speaker sleeping next to each other and separation of them to deny the speaker's "pleasure" indicates a disruptive sexual component to their relationship.[33] McKay's erotic disruption of "de ways of dis ya world" (the ways of this here world) is again repeated in the final Bennie poem, "Consolation." While the speaker again laments that his love for Bennie is "not de way o' dis ya wul'" (49), McKay's lingering repetitions over this space in which queer love becomes a possibility work to disrupt an insistence on the destructive ways of the world. On the one hand, the lines "So wid de man, toy of a Will / E'er playin with him to its fill, / To-day alive, tomorrow slain, / Thus all our pleasure ends in pain." (60) seem to argue that queer love is doomed to fail and cause pain; on the other, McKay's language performs a doubleness that simultaneously attenuates erotic possibility. The capitalization of "Will," as if it were a proper name, evokes eroticism between men and also echoes Shakespeare's sexual punning on his name, thus shifting the emphasis of these lines towards "pleasure" and eroticizing the ending of "pain." As McKay blends Jamaican Creole into a formal Shakespearean language and meter, his sonic shifts open up a space for the perpetuation and prolongation of the expression and imagining of queer sexuality.

The echoing of McKay's lament against the structural impossibility of "de ways o' dis ya wul" as an indication of the resistant gesture of queer desire in both "Bennie's Departure" and "Consolation" also evokes a prior poem of McKay's, "We Fe' Do?" in *Songs of Jamaica*. "We

[33] Holcomb also interprets this stanza in "Bennie's Departure" as an explicit reference to queer sex: "Passages of *Constab Ballad*'s poems make perfunctory attempts at dissembling their queer meaning by offering alternative readings: representations of asexual homosocial relationships, manly comrades in arms. But the stanza above does not attempt such a pretext. One may contextualize the narrative's subject. Although we cannot be sure why the two black proteltarian-class gay constables were separated, we can speculate judiciously, considering how colonial authorities operating under the consensus of late Victorian imperial assumptions about sexual 'inversion' would have looked on a same-sex relationship." (77).

Fe' Do?" is not an explicitly queer poem, but the repetition of this phrase is relevant to understanding the resistant political impetus of McKay's queering the constabulary. In a footnote, McKay translates the Creole title as "What to do? Equivalent to 'What can be cured must be endured," which again points to the problem of the structural impossibility of living otherwise.[34] "We Fe' Do?" is narrated in second person, with the "we" acting as a collective voice for the Black Jamaican working class, providing a clear critique of how the social and legal structures of colonialism and racism produce generations of impoverishment for Black Jamaicans:

> God mek de wul' fe black an' white;
> We'll wuk on in de glad sunlight,
> Keep toilin' on wid all our might,
> An' sleep in peace when it is night:
> We must strive on to gain de height,
> Aldough it may not be in sight;
> An' yet perhaps de blessed right
> Will never conquer in de fight—
> Still, whe' fe do? (47-55)

This poem does not directly offer a call to proletarian revolt, but the continued second person "we" does enact a call for solidarity in action. The poem's emphasis is on the structural injustice dealt to the black working class (with the action of toiling in the sunlight evocative of labor on the slave plantation, implicitly drawing a connection to the agricultural labor that was a common occupation of the Black Jamaican working class at the time). However, by pointing out this inequality and insisting that the repeated intergenerational impoverishment and forced labor is

[34] The extensive notes providing translations of McKay's Creole language into Standard English are likely attributable to Jekyll, which leads Bernstein to argue that "the controlling hand of white editorial authority is always present on the page" (12). Nurhussein goes further: "The excesses of Jekyll's apparatus serve a purpose for him, and for the audience he imagined for McKay. Any trace of the inscrutability that might remain in the text would threaten the standard-English-Speaking reader, who imagines that the language of the poem would be perfectly accessible, legible, and natural to any black reader" (198). In extending these scholarly commentaries on Jekyll's notes, I argue that like police work, these notes serve a regulatory purpose in enabling white colonial readers to surveil the meanings of Black speech.

merely “de way o’ dis ya wul’” (60), McKay calls for an imagining of how the world could be otherwise. Although McKay stops short of calling for a direct revolution, he also indicates that the marginalized have the power to resist, arguing they will “fight de wul’ de best we can, / E’en though it hard fe understan’– / Whe’ we mus’ do.” (57-59). The continued questioning of what can be done and the ambiguity of this poem’s call to action separate it from the genre of a Marxist or Black Nationalist political tract and allow us to envision a more diffuse revolution of resistant enactments of another way of living. Although this particular poem does not elaborate on a specifically queer resistance, the echoing of McKay’s critique of “de ways o’ dis ya wul’” implies that queer intimacy has the potential to enact a challenge to the structure of the world with the potential force of a proletarian revolution.[35] Although the prefigured ending of all the Bennie poems is Bennie’s leaving, and therefore the dissolution of his relationship with the speaker, McKay’s extending, imagining, and revisiting a poetic space in which queer desire is not only possible but also a refusal to police and rejection of colonial law (particularly the criminalization of homosexuality) places the impetus of these poems on the revolutionary potential of the repeated enactment of queer possibility in spite of future loss.

McKay’s poem “To Clarendon Hills and H.A.H.” in *Songs of Jamaica* is positioned autobiographically as an elegy to McKay’s hometown, Clarendon Hills. The poem’s address of devotion to “Loved Clarendon Hills” (1) is transferred to “H.A.H,” an unknown figure who is referred to as a “frien’” (17) in a shift in the middle of the poem and gendered male through the

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[35] Gary Holcomb argues that McKay’s queer politics was inextricable from his later involvement with Marxism: “One may not grasp [McKay’s] black Marxism without perceiving the author’s radical disposition toward the use of the sexualized black male worker’s body in capitalist production and colonialist mastery. Queer resistance authorizes the act of uncovering the inti-mate relationship between sex radicalism, race resistance, and leftist anarchism, as the queer—repudiating, indeed politicizing the already received rhetoric of stable sexual identity—must inhale and exhale anarchy, or permanent revolution” (14). Although *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* were written prior to McKay’s identification with Marxism, he was involved with Fabian Socialism in Jamaica (Holcomb 34; Cooper 90).

address of “lad” (36, 37). Significantly, the poem makes a declaration of love to “H.A.H” by gesturing towards an affect in excess of femininity:

> Ah, dear frien ' o' mine,
> Love me, frien' o' mine,
> Wid that love of thine
> Passin' love of womenkin’,
> More dan love of womenkin’:
> Clasp me to your breast,
> Pillow me to rest (25-31)

“Clarendon Hills” follows a regular meter of trochaic dimeter with an added syllable that provides a masculine ending, however the lines “Passin’ love of womenkin’, / More dan love of womenkin’:” enact an excess of meter by adding an extra syllable to complete the final foot. In a similar production of formal excess, this stanza contains an additional line whereas the others are all octaves. The homoeroticism of the speaker’s love for H.A.H. is referenced through comparison to the supposedly normative heterosexual love of women, but rather than being equivalent, this love is described as in excess: “Passin’” and “More.”[36] This enacts a hyper-femininization that is queered by going beyond appropriate normative expression. The erotics of the final lines “Clasp me to your breast, / Pillow me to rest” insist upon a sexual intimacy with H.A.H., with “pillow” acting as a synecdoche for bed. The final stanza of the poem extends this intimacy into an erotic love for the geographical location of Clarendon Hills, which becomes an addressee interchangeable with “frien’”:

> Loved Clarendon hills,
> Cherished frien' o' mine,
> Oh, my bosom thrills,
> Soul an' body pine:
> Trough de wul' I rove,
> Pinin' for your love (42-47)

[36] McKay’s footnote to these lines cites the Biblical verse 2 Samuel 1:26 in which David declares his love for Johnathan, claiming it surpasses the love of women.

The dual address of this poem establishes an erotic connection to Jamaica (or a localized geography of Jamaica) that is equivalent to queer love.[37] This is not a nationalistic declaration of political sovereignty, but an affective establishment of personal relation to the landscape that is the site of queer erotic potential. Again, in this poem, McKay references the totality of the "wul." While the world in this poem is a site of vagabondage and doesn't necessarily provide the restrictive enforcement of normativity that it does in "Bennie's Departure" and "We Fe' Do?" it is still a space cut off from the atemporal queerness of Clarendon Hills, a site that is kept sealed and apart, in the past, but which may be endlessly returned to through longing and memory.

McKay's homoerotic devotion to the landscape of rural Jamaica as the utopian alternative to the urban space of police control is again instantiated in the final poem of *Constab Ballads*, "To W.G.G." This poem anticipates a return to the constable speaker's rural home after securing his discharge from the force (which was incidentally also the condition that allowed McKay the liberty to publish his poems that were not entirely flattering to the police force). "To W.G.G." addresses an unnamed constable comrade, imaginatively appealing to an erotic partnership in which this figure might join in the speakers' fugitive retreat from the police. The poem begins, "COME, come wid me, my tired soul, / 'Way from de miserable wul';" (1-2). McKay here extends the desire to reject the "miserable wul,'" which his other poems suggest is categorically hostile to the Black queer working-class subject position. His pastoral elevation of the Jamaican landscape that follows provides an idyllic alternative to the worldly impossibilities. While this opening line at first seems an invitation, the syntax posits the addressee as "my tired soul," suggesting that the constable speaker may in fact only be addressing himself, that the fantasy of a

[37] This can be compared to the queered eroticization of the Martinican landscape in the poetry of Drasta Houël in which the eroticization of the feminized natural landscape suggests sexual intimacy between women. See Chapter Two for my discussion of Houël's verse.

sustained erotic partnership in the rural hills may not be materially possible. The subsequent lines maintain a second person address to "you" and present renewed appeals for comradery such as "come flee de envy an' de strife, / Before dey ruin our life" (9-10) and "We'll spend our short days here; an' still, / Though prisoners, feel somehow free" (30-31), yet the final stanza suggests a separation has already occurred and this fantasy is unachievable:

> Dear comrade o' de constab life,
> I've gone an' left you in de strife;
> But whether skies are dark or blue,
> Dis true true heart remembers you. (33-36)

The shift to past tense enacted with "I've gone an' left you" undermines the suggestive requests and future tense suppositions of the previous stanzas ("Come," "We'll") to indicate that the future these stanzas imagine has already been foreclosed. "To W.G.G." is written in the structure of a modified ballad (appearing in a book of poems labelled "Ballads," though they do not all in fact follow this form). It is written as a series of quatrains in iambic tetrameter, but the uniformity of McKay's meter is a departure from traditional ballad form, as alternate lines should only include three stressed syllables.[38] In addition to referencing orality, the ballad form suggests a narrative, yet the narrative McKay furnishes in "To W.G.G." is first positioned as speculative, then retrospectively revealed to be an unfulfilled fantasy. While this final poem enacts the idyllic and fugitive queer space imagined outside of the imposed and violent order of police surveillance, this space can only be conceptualized and sustained as an unachievable fantasy constructed through the failure of desire.

[38] While an iambic meter is not required for a ballad, alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter is one common ballad form. McKay's deviations from the traditional form of the ballad while continuing to reference and engage with it lead Hunter to argue that "McKay creolizes the ballad" (576).

Policing, Gender, and Sexuality in McKay's Queer Narratives

As I have argued, McKay's constable poems enter into the narrative genres of policing and criminal confession through the narrative framing of his preface to *Constab Ballads*. Through McKay's constructions of the autobiographical constable narrative self, he enacts a narrative structure of surveillance that generates and perpetuates identity categories and polices their boundaries. Although McKay attempts to evade, queer, and creolize this narrative police work through the constable's reluctance to perform his duties, the constable narrator is nevertheless interpellated over and over again into the role of policing that structures his narratives. In *The Novel and the Police*, D.A. Miller poses an ideological concurrence between narrative and police work:

> In what follows, I shall be considering what such views necessarily dismiss: the possibility of a radical *entanglement* between the nature of the novel and the practice of the police. In particular, I shall want to address two questions deriving from this entanglement. How do the police systematically function as a topic in the "world" of the novel? And how does the novel—as a set of representational techniques—systematically participate in a general economy of policing power? (2)

While Miller positions this analysis of narrative's participation "in a general economy of policing power" only in terms of the novel (and more specifically the nineteenth century novel), this "entanglement" with policing or detective work could be more broadly extended to other narrative forms. While McKay did not write police novels, he did produce police narratives that critique and are self-conscious of the surveillance, interrogation, and regulatory function of "policing power." In probing into the criminalization and eventual punishment of queer and deviant sexual practices (the arrest of sex workers and other Black Jamaicans caught in compromising sexual situations), McKay's police narratives thus inadvertently produce and maintain the queer category of criminal sexuality and uphold it as a subject of narrative surveillance.

In addition to the narrative framing of his constable poetry, McKay returns to the police narrative much later in his short story "When I Pounded the Pavement," published in *Gingertown* (1932). "When I Pounded the Pavement" is a seemingly autobiographical first-person narrative again positioned from the point-of-view of a constable. "While I Pounded the Pavement" begins with the constable's admonition by the inspector for not having "made a case" (arrested a suspect) and arrives at the ending of his obtaining his first and only case before quitting the police force. The ending of narrative impasse with the constable's refusal to continue the police work he had already deferred (by not "making cases") is motivated by a specific incident in which the constable is made complicit in a white official of the Department of Public Welfare's use of the legal system to enact sexual violence upon a Black domestic worker and her boyfriend, while also denying Black Jamaicans a representative voice in the colonial government. The narrative lead-up to this "case" defers police work in favor of a plot of failed queer romance. The constable suggests he joined the police force in the first place "under the impulse of a strong adolescent friendship" (207), to maintain an intimate connection to another constable. The initial description of their continued intimacy as new recruits is narrated as a romance:

> And by the strangest coincidences the drill days for my friend and me were the same and we were always put side by side during exercises. We had not ourselves thought of anything so realistically romantic happening to us. Yet there was more to come when, like a dream fully realized (after five months at the depot), a request came in from an important residential district for two bright men, and we were chosen (209).

Their homoerotic pairing on the police force is described in the terms of a lover's fantasy: "We had not ourselves thought of anything so realistically romantic," "like a dream fully realized," "we were chosen." This intimacy seems to diminish, however, due to the work of policing. The deflating outcome to the idealized partnership is that the narrator fails to arrest a "drunk and

disorderly" man and gets reprimanded by the inspector, while the friend "made his case by the easiest opportunity that came to him" by arresting "a street girl that we both used to visit in common" (212). In addition to pointing out the hypocrisy and corruption of a police officer arresting a sex worker he visits to meet his quota, this anecdote suggests a triangulation of homoerotic desire through the two men's "common" visits to this woman, implying sexual relations between the men enacted through her. Her position as a sex worker further places queerness in relation to sex work and entangles the work of policing with taboo and criminalized sexuality.[39]

Following this entanglement of surveillance, discipline, and taboo sexuality, it is significant then that the eventual "case" the narrative defers serves to enact a structure of surveillance that criminalizes Black sexuality more broadly and exploits a basic criminalization of Black life to maintain the white imperial power structure in colonial Jamaica. The narrator's "case" begins when the Public Welfare official, Mr. Klinger, enlists the police because he suspects that a Black man (who turns out to be a young middle-class politician) has been visiting a domestic worker in her lodgings at his house. The narrator explains that a recent amendment to Jamaica's Vagrancy law made these consensual romantic visits an offense when they occurr on an employer's "property," precisely with the goal of criminalizing Black sexuality. Mr. Klinger thus hires the constable to keep watch overnight in order to catch this visitor and the domestic worker in the act of having consensual sex. After the official forces the constable to break into the domestic worker's room to surprise the couple, McKay describes the systemic violence that ensues from this brutal surveillance and criminalization of Black living and sexuality:

[39] While the narrator claims this moment snapped "the last thread of feeling attaching me to the place," he apparently continues to accompany this "friend" to visit sex workers as he later mentions his eventual "case" occurred on a Saturday night, "the night I always loved to spend with my friend in the Bijou bar-room of Essie Miller, the notorious quadroon love-girl" (215).

> I had to arrest him. He dressed himself and I took him to the lock-up. The next day his father bailed him out. And he was front-page news, photograph and all. When the case was tried he received a maximum sentence. Six months in prison and twenty-one strokes of the tamarind switch. Convicted as a common criminal, his political career was broken. But I think that what broke him most of all was the switch. Policemen holding him down on a block and taking down his pants and whipping him for sleeping with a girl (219-20).[40]

The public abuse and humiliation of this man whose only "crime" was having consensual sex with his girlfriend in her own lodgings presents an extreme exertion of colonial control over the sexuality and intimate lives of Black Jamaicans. This amounts to an extreme denial of intimacy and interiority by the state, as even the personal and private space of the domestic worker's bedroom is subjected to a violent police surveillance. Furthermore, the effect of this policing is to destroy the political career of a popular young Black politician, enhancing white colonial control and inhibiting Black Jamaican political autonomy. McKay's narrative implies that this was an intentional calculation to preserve white nepotism in the colonial government, for the man arrested was "a candidate for the Legislative Chamber. All the signs showed that he would win by popular vote. I learned later that his opponent, a European, was a friend of Mr. Klinger's; some said he was even a relative" (219). While the relationship McKay describes between the domestic worker and the politician in this story is heterosexual and seemingly normative, the effect of this policing and extensive colonial surveillance of intimate and private space is to make any expression of Black Jamaican sexuality potentially criminal, deviant, and therefore

[40] Winston James notes that whippings by the "tamarind switch," also a feature in several of McKay's constable poems, was a common disciplinary punishment bestowed in colonial Jamaica: "The tamarind switch, made from young branches of the tamarind tree, is pliable but hard, knotty, and strong. A dreaded instrument of punishment dating from slavery, it was designed to inflict fiery and lingering pain; it stings and cuts" (*Bolshevik* 146). The use of this particular implement of punishment thus serves as a painful evocation of slavery and systemic violence enacted upon Black lives in Jamaica, and it is also specifically tied to the geohistory of the Caribbean. While the tamarind tree grows in tropical zones around the world, the plant is indigenous to Africa and also found in Asia, and thus would have been introduced to the tropical Americas through the violent processes of colonization, slavery, and transport of indentured laborers from South Asia.

queer. The sexual violence enacted against the Black couple (exposing them naked in bed, publicly whipping the man with his pants stripped away) runs parallel to the narrative of queer failure implied in the ending of the friendship between the narrator and the other constable that coincides with the ending of the narrator's career in policing. Significantly, this friendship also ends with the punishment of criminalized sexuality through the friend's arrest of the sex worker. The enforcement of the law in this narrative thus works to suggest that any form of Black sexuality could be surveilled and punished by the state and a fluid and liberatory embrace of queer desire is not possible under the conditions of policing. British colonial law therefore becomes another form of sexual violence and violation.

While the homosocial space of policing is governed by cultural associations of masculinity, as is also the case of the homosociality of laboring men McKay generates in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, McKay strikingly articulates a queerness that points to the unspoken erotics between these men through a diffuse figuring of femininity. *Home to Harlem* expressly evokes the figure of the lesbian as a site of queer erotic exchange between McKay's male characters. This occurs when Ray, the Haitian intellectual (thus himself a creole figure), describes to Jake the French book he is reading with a character named Sappho, and thus initiates Jake into a knowledge of queer femininity:

> "Sapphic and Lesbian…b e a u t i f u l words."
> "What is that there Lesbian?"
> "Lovely word, eh?"
> "Tha's what we calls bulldyker in Harlem," drawled Jake. "Them's all ugly womens."
> "Not *all.*" And that's a damned ugly name, the waiter said. "Harlem is too savage about some things. *Bulldyker,*" the waiter stressed with a sneer. (129)

While Jake's insulting of lesbians and Ray's rejection of the slang term "*Bulldyker*" is a notable refusal of solidarity, as this particular term indexed Black and working-class lesbian

communities, the unspeakable queer erotics between Ray and Jake seem to only be expressible through an acknowledgement of queer femininity. In elevating the term "lesbian," Ray also feminizes it, not only through its literal meaning of women who desire women, but by describing the sound of the word as "lovely," a feminizing diminutive. Ray's sonic extension of "beautiful" produces a repeated caesura where queer femininity momentarily becomes idealized and expressible, a brief space of alternate possibility, a breakage in the rigid structures of capitalist labor and heterosexuality that is achieved through language. The elevation of "lesbian" over "bulldyker" notably emphasizes an adoration of white, femme, and bourgeois normative queer identity over the black, butch, and working-class associations of "bulldyker," a term that McKay locates in Harlem in opposition to the exotic European antiquity of "lesbian." With much emphasis on the foreignness and unintelligibility of the Greek derived words "sapphic" and "lesbian" in the French text that Ray translates for Jake, the queering of language through what initially seems illegible becomes readable, knowable queerness. These words thus also become creolized terms in the sense of linguistic and cultural mixing: being derived from Greek and entering into the English narrative via mediation by French (although these terms are not attached to the particular history of slavery and colonialism). Furthermore, the Black dialectical term "bulldyker" comes up against the literary, European associations of "lesbian" and "sapphic," creolizing this exchange through the clashing of signifiers. McKay's use of counter-normative linguistics to reveal queer possibility demonstrates a similar disruptive potential of language as his earlier Creole poetry, albeit one that privileges the mystified over the lived reality of working-class black lesbians in Harlem in the case of this novel. Unmentioned in this passage is the association built elsewhere between Harlem's queer men and women through the repeated refrain, "And there is two things in Harlem I don't understan' / It is a bulldyking

woman and a faggoty man" (129). The inability or refusal of Jake (and more broadly the narrative voice) to understand the queerness that, through this refrain, seems to be geographically imbued in Harlem further problematizes the construction of place. In a novel where the title labels Harlem "home," this defamiliarization of Harlem due to its queerness dislocates Jake from the psychological inhabitation of its geography (he has already travelled beyond Harlem through his work on the railroad). As the figure of the lesbian becomes an overdetermined sign of queer meaning, the referent of queer masculinity and eroticism between men is the unspoken repressed. Ray himself is a Creole character, a Haitian immigrant who initiates Jake into an understanding of Black diasporic Creole history, particularly the Haitian Revolution, as he constructs for Jake a lexicon of queer meanings that both illuminate and obscure the queered exchange.

Colonial Surveillance and Sexual Violence in *Banana Bottom*

McKay published *Banana Bottom* in 1933 while living in Morocco. It was his final novel to be published in his lifetime and the only major work set in Jamaica since he left in 1912. In contrast to his early poems immersed in the sonic landscape of Jamaica, *Banana Bottom* was written from the distance of memory, temporally off-set to the "early nineteen hundreds," and rooted in the characters' genealogical ties to slavery. The novel begins with the characterization of the fictional Jamaican town, Banana Bottom, as produced through the sexual exploitation of slavery and colonialism that flows into the backstory of Bita's rape that initiates the novel's plot. Structured as a seemingly conventional *bildungsroman*, *Banana Bottom* narrates Bita's return to Jamaica after having been raped as a child and then sent to England to receive an elite education by white missionaries who take her on "to train as an exhibit" (17). Upon her return to Jamaica, the missionaries intensify their regulation of Bita's sexuality by setting out to find her a proper

husband, regardless of her wishes. Mentored by Squire Gensir, a British aristocrat who is often interpreted as a figure for Walter Jekyll (to whom McKay dedicated the novel),[41] Bita re-identifies herself with Black Jamaican culture and eventually marries the man of her choice, who is from the working-class, having finally rejected the missionaries' exertion of control over her narrative trajectory. Although a *bildungsroman*, or novel of formation,[42] that focuses particularly on the regulation of Bita's sexuality through marriage, *Banana Bottom* depicts sexuality as an extremely disturbing and destructive force that is continuously entangled with the exercise of colonial control. The man who rapes Bita, Crazy Bow, seems directly manifested from the legacy of rape and sexual abuse of enslaved women:

> Crazy Bow was a direct descendent, third generation, of a strange Scotchman who had emigrated to Jamaica in the eighteen twenties. This Scotchman built the vast mountain estate of Banana Bottom, liberated the slaves, and married one of the blackest of them. […] His progeny in Banana Bottom and the surrounding villages numbers a score of families. A variegated multitude from coffee-brown to café-au-lait. (2-3)

While the backstory McKay provides casts this relationship between the planter and his slave as a marriage rather than coercion, the position of a plantation master (however abolitionist his politics) and an enslaved woman is fundamentally unequal and prefigured by slavery's absolute denial of sexual agency to the enslaved.

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[41] Winston James confirms the connection between Jekyll and McKay's character Squire Gensir: "*Banana Bottom*, published in 1933, was dedicated to Jekyll. Squire Gensir, an important character in the novel, was based on Jekyll, as McKay himself pointed out in a prefatory note to the novel. McKay's was a warm and generous portrait of Jekyll, but it was by no means uncritical." (*Bolshevik* 57).

[42] Lisa Lowe argues that the *bildungsroman* functions as the novel of formation of proper national and colonial subjects: "The bildungsroman emerged as the primary form for narrating the development of the individual from youthful innocence to civilized maturity, the telos of which is the reconciliation of the individual with the social order. The novel of formation has a special status among the works selected for a canon, for it elicits the reader's identification with the bildung narrative of ethical formation, itself a narrative of the individuals relinquishing of particularity and difference through identification with an idealized 'national' form of subjectivity" (98). Michelle Stephens supports a reading of *Banana Bottom* as nationalistically bound to these genre conventions: "the writer returns to the Caribbean island as the original site of home through the narrative of a female protagonist's return to the home island and the Caribbean national romance" (142).

By positioning rape as the originary moment of Bita's education, coming-of-age, and entry into sexuality, McKay demonstrates Saidiya Hartman's definitional framing of black womanhood as instantiated through sexual violation in *Scenes of Subjection*. In Hartman's argument, for the enslaved, subjection to extreme violence occupies the place of birth in the narrative structure of *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass*, for example, when, in representing the brutal assault of his aunt, "Douglass establishes the centrality of violence to the making of the slave and identifies it as an original generative act equivalent to the statement 'I was born'" (3). While Bita is not enslaved, and the conditions of her experience are located in the post-slavery colonial space of Jamaica in the early twentieth century, Hartman's argument that "the erasure or disavowal of sexual violence engendered black femaleness as a condition of unredressed injury, which only intensified the bonds of captivity and the deadening objectification of chattel status" (101) points to how, as a young black woman, Bita would have already been constituted as available to sexual violation. The community of Banana Bottom responds by recognizing her assault as rape, allowing for the white missionary benefactors to reaffirm Bita's position in the Black middle class by sending her to England for an elite education. By beginning the narrative with sexual assault, however, McKay illustrates how her entry into societal recognition and protection of the "purity" of femininity has been engendered through sexual violence. After Bita returns to Jamaica, the missionaries continue to enact another form of sexual violence upon Bita through their attempt to control, invalidate, and regulate her sexuality.[43]

[43] See the Introduction for my discussion of Hartman's argument that Black femininity is constituted through the originary rape of the slave in relation to discourses of *métissage* or racial mixing that underly constructions of the creole.

The engendering of Bita through her experience of sexual assault (and the continued treatment of young black women as available for sexual control) is transmitted into the oral mythology of the town of Banana Bottom as the townspeople continue to cruelly mock her access to elite status stemming from rape, repeating and reaffirming the symbolic imagining of black femininity as constituted through availability to assault. Bita's sexual violation becomes a joke and a source of a cruelly mocking song sung for entertainment: "You may wrap her up in silk, / You may trim her up with gold, / And the prince may come after / To ask for your daughter, / But Crazy Bow was first." (14). McKay provides the lyrics to this "song" of violation, calling it a "sugary ditty" from which "the countryside was ringing with rakish singing" (14). The lyrics to this song are clearly violent and resort to the diluted cliché of the "prince" and the decadence of "gold" and "silk," which seem to derogatorily equate black women's sexuality with a lavish display of empty wealth. McKay indicates that this song is a source of trauma for Bita and uses this device to create narrative distance from the repressive and cruel perspective of the town, yet in producing the mocking lyrics of this song, he also participates in the perpetuation of deriding and blaming victims of rape. By re-casting this narrative in a mocking song that is repeated, remembered, and mythologizes Bita's rape as shared communal history, McKay also gestures to the traumatic indelibility of sexual violence. Through Bita's voicelessness in the construction and performance of this "ditty," McKay illustrates how Banana Bottom's discursive history is entangled with the assumed availability and rape-ability of young women, particularly if they are Black and working class, without the inclusion of their voices in historical narration.

Throughout the narrative of *Banana Bottom*, excessive sexuality is repeatedly treated as the source of destruction, and while sexual deviance could be read as an evocation of the queer,

it also seems an expression of the excessive regulation of colonial law. Apart from Bita and Squire Gensir, the inhabitants of Banana Bottom are characterized as excessively and inappropriately controlled by sexuality: the minister that Bita is supposed to marry is disgraced when caught in an act of bestiality and Bita's friend Yoni is fired from her job teaching sewing when she is caught having sex with her boyfriend at the school. Yoni's name is itself a signifier of feminine sexual excess, a term meaning female genitalia and given to her as a seeming joke by the Indian laborers her mother worked with. Yoni's mother "said she had wanted to give her child a real uncommon name and one of the Indians had told her that if it was a girl, she should call it Yoni" (64). McKay's joke is that Yoni's mother doesn't understand the meaning of the name and is drawn to the exoticism of the unintelligible word, not knowing that she is presenting her child as a vulgar embodiment of sexuality, reproduction, and genitalia. "Yoni" in McKay's text functions in a sense as a creole word (though it is Indian in origin), as a difficult to decipher sign of inter-cultural contact between Afro-Caribbean people and South Asian indentured laborers that was forged through the processes of British colonization, enslavement, and forced migration. Thus, the excess of sexuality and signals of deviance, diminishment, and repeated catching and punishing of improper sexual acts is a direct result of how the colonial system has regulated sexuality through control and punishment. While disturbing, McKay's representations of deviant sexuality through rape and bestiality are monitored, made taboo, and punished by the society of townspeople and the legal system. This demonstrates the broader system of policing and surveillance of sexuality in colonial Jamaica, which also serves to regulate queer sexuality in McKay's earlier works. There is, of course, no comparison between queer sexuality and non-consensual sexual violence, but rather these moments in the text act as ill-fitted stand-ins for the unspeakability of queer sex and evocations of how non-normative sexuality, and Black male

sexuality in particular, is criminalized and harshly regulated. Crazy Bow's rape of Bita is inexcusable, but his punishment by the criminal justice system does nothing to address the harm caused. Instead, he becomes permanently trapped in a destructive system of incarceration and institutionalization for mental illness. After having apparently been released from prison and encountering Bita again when playing music at the mission, Crazy Bow attempts to strangle another person and falls right back into the legal system: "he was considered a dangerous person by the local authorities and so he was arrested and sent up to the madhouse. After a few violent weeks there, he died in the straitjacket" (258). Although he is not a positive figure in *Banana Bottom*, Crazy Bow's prolonged violent experience with the legal system acts as a perpetuation and extension state violence to control sexuality. His rape of Bita results in her being placed under the authority of the white missionaries who work to regulate and determine the conditions of her life and deny her the possibility of choice concerning sexuality and marriage. Sexual violation thus initiates Bita into a structure of colonial control that seems more benign (providing her an education), but nonetheless situates sexuality as a site of colonization.

When read in the context of McKay's police narratives set in Jamaica, as *Gingertown* was published the previous year, *Banana Bottom* seems to extend McKay's constructions of Jamaica as a space of state surveillance and regulatory control that expands violently into even the most intimate areas of Black Jamaican life. The disturbing associations of sexual deviance imbued in the space of colonial Jamaica in *Banana Bottom* are therefore an effect of the environment of constant surveillance and regulation exerted by the British missionaries and legal authorities that cast Black sexuality as criminal by default. It is significant that McKay stages his narrative return to Jamaica through the feminine figure of Bita, and that in circumventing the surveillance and control of the missionaries, Bita finds happiness in a return to the rural, natural,

and agrarian space, married to a working-class Black Jamaican man. In enacting the fantasy of return to the rural, beyond metropolitan surveillance and police control, Bita seems to accomplish the fantasy of escape to the liberatory alternative presented by nature in McKay's poems "To W.G.G." and "To Clarendon Hills and H.A.H." While this ending does not sustain the queer love of the constable, McKay's police writing has already pointed to this impossibility. Instead, a version of the ideal outside is accomplished only through its redirection through the feminine figure of Bita, a creole space of narrative fantasy that requires a final transposition into femininity to imagine, if not access.

CONCLUSION

In tracing modernist evocations of the creole through the transatlantic circuits, I have identified particular texts, authors, and nodes of creole modernism located in Jamaica, Dominica, Martinique and Guadeloupe, New Orleans, London, and Paris. Yet a creole geography is not structured through the particularities of these spaces but through the diffuse relationality of the transatlantic that occurs through the residues of colonialism and slavery, as well as the modernist migrations that resulted from these histories. In creole modernist texts such as Alice Dunbar-Nelson's short fiction, Drasta Houël's poetry, Suzanne Lacascade's *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark,* and Claude McKay's Jamaican writings, I have examined how queer femininity is attached to figurations of the creole and how the gendered significations of *creole* are intimately tied to constructions of race. Rhys's fantasy and projection of desire onto Black feminine creole figures is not the same as Dunbar-Nelson's description of the un-gendering and un-becoming of the creole figure through the excess of Carnival, nor are these equivalent to Houël's intimate feminine erotics, Lacascade's deflation of *métissage*, or McKay's queering of the constabulary through a homoerotic and feminizing creole stylistics. And yet each of these formulations of creole modernism demonstrates the porosity of racial and gender categories and ultimately undermines the hegemonic structuring of national and colonial ideologies.

These texts posit queered, feminized, intimate, and ultimately creole moments of rupture of the colonial order, while falling short of revolution, for evocations of the creole are by definition fluid, transitory, or impossible to sustain. For Dunbar-Nelson, this moment of falling short occurs through the creole feminine tragic endings of death and loss, for Houël through the continued reminder of the passage of time and the ultimate devastation of Mount Pelée that has

already occurred, for Lacascade through the turn to compulsory heterosexuality that reinscribes the creole into the colonial romance, for Rhys through the biopolitical exercise of regulatory violence upon feminine bodies and the absolute foreclosure of a desired queer interracial intimacy within the colonial cultural logic, and for McKay through the impossibility of sustaining a space of queer liberation beyond the imperial structures of policing and surveillance. This modernist extension of an alternative speculative possibility that is continually met with its undoing demonstrates how the creole is defined through its contradictions, ambivalence, and transience. The project of the creole is not to produce and sustain novel utopias, but rather to gesture towards a sense of the alternative, even as it is diffuse, fleeting, and already undone. It is the process of creolization that underlies the concept of modernity as both aspirational and violent, both rupture and production, a sense of novelty generated thorough the residues of transatlantic exchange, colonialism, and slavery, and thus a newness that arrives in the recurrent hauntings of the past.

By arguing that the creole is a feminized figure, I do not mean that the creole enacts or pertains to one singular gender identity, but rather that its significations are entangled with discourses of gendering and feminization, just as they are with discourses of racialization. Situated within a logic of feminization, the creole is thus positioned as marginal, eccentric, or queer. This also indicates that the gendered structure of femininity is creolized, in the sense that it is fluid, permeable, multivalent, which is what allows McKay, Rhys, and Houël, for example, to project fantasies of the feminine to access the creole and the queer.

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APPENDIX

Créoleries

By Drasta Houël

English Translations by Rose DuCharme[1]

Que ou vle… Que ou pas vle
ou Le Pont d'amour

(Poème nègre)

Manzèle-là qui ka passé là, — ka senti bon con réséda, — qui li ni bel foula brodé — gran cossé con femmes « béké », di moin ti tac si cé tout ça — qui ka fai vous poté tête ou — con couleuvre qui ka passé d'lo ?

Manzèle-là, chè, ou va bo fai — magré toute *flapp flapp* jupon vou — fiété ou pa ké duré guè : pié ou chaussé, rivié pas loin.

Moin ja ka cueilli patchouly — pou moin froté assus co moin — pace que *ou vlé, que ou pas vlé* manzèle-là, chè, moin ka di vous : — cé deux bras moin, ou peu couè moin, — qui ka lé sévi ou pont — pou fai ou passé gro d'lo là.

[1] The Martinican Creole and Standard French text of these poems published in Houël's *Les Vies légères* (1916) are based on my consultation of the *Autrement Mêmes* series reprint of Houël's writing alongside an original edition of *Les Vies légères* in the archives at the Aresenal branch of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris. Houël is the author of both the original Creole verisons of the poems and their translations into Standard French. Little's footnotes indicate that the first three poems in this series (*Que ou vlue… Que ou pas vle ou Le Pont d'amour / Que tu le veuilles… Que tu ne le veuilles pas ou Le Pont d'amour*, *Adieu bonheu / Adieu bonheur*, and *Chacun son tou / Chacun son tour*) were also republished in *Mercure de France*, June 1, 1931. Since I am not a speaker of Creole language, my translations are based on the Standard French versions, with reference to the Creole texts and consultation of French-Creole dictionaries. For commentary on my translations, including my discussion of discrepancies between the Creole and French versions, see the footnotes that follow. The *Autrement mêmes* reprint modified the order of Houël's *Créoleries* poems due to concerns with pagination, but upon consulting the archival copy in Paris, I have restored their original order. I have also made some textual changes from the *Autrement mêmes* printing in reverting to some of the Creole spellings and punctuation used in both the Creole and French versions of the poems based on how they appeared in the original. There was one notable lexical change in the French version of *Adieu bonheu* that I have corrected based on the Paris archival copy. It is possible that *Autrement mêmes* editor Roger Little had made these changes based on the only other known archival copy at the Bibliothèque Schoelcher in Fort-de-France, Martinique, which I do not have access to. In any case, I have chosen to take the Paris archival copy as the definitive for my transcriptions of Houël's text. Houël's translations have some discrepancies in form and punctuation from her Creole versions, and in my translations I have chosen, whenever possible, to maintain the punctuation used in the creole. There are some words or phrases I have slightly modified or added based on their use in the Creole version that was not carried into the French (particularly with additions of *ché*, meaning *dear*). In other cases, I have based my translation on the French version, despite noted discrepancies, because I do not have the linguistic ability to translate directly from Creole.

Que tu le veuilles… Que tu ne le veuilles pas ou Le Pont d'amour

(Traduction)

Hé ! la demoiselle qui passes là ! — qui embaumes le réséda, — portes un beau foulard brodé, — un grand corset comme les femmes « chic », — est-ce d'être si joliment parée — qui te rend donc tellement fière ?…

Chère, malgré toutes tes manières, — ton dédain ne tiendra guère. — Va, tu as d'élégantes chaussures, — et la rivière ne coule pas loin.

Déjà, je cueille le patchouli — et je m'en parfume le corps — car, que tu veuilles, ou ne veuilles pas, ce sont mes bras, belle demoiselle, — qui seuls te serviront de pont — pour traverser l'eau tumultueuse.

If you want it… If you don't want it Or The Bridge of Love

(A Black poem)[2]

Madamoiselle walking by, — perfumed with *reseda*, — wearing a beautifully embroidered headscarf — a large corset like the "chic" white women, tell me — is being so finely dressed — what makes you so proud?

Madamoiselle, dear, in spite of your airs — your disdain will never hold — go ahead, in your elegant shoes: — the river doesn't run far.

Already, I've picked the patchouli — to perfume my body — for, *whether you like it or not*, I tell you: — here are my arms, beautiful lady, — which alone serve as your bridge — for crossing the tumultuous water.[3]

[2] The caption on the Creole version of each of the poems in this series refers to it as "a Black poem" (in a racial sense), whereas the Standard French versions are labeled as translations. It is unclear what precisely Houël meant by writing "Black poems," but perhaps she was referring to a racialized connotation of the Creole language? I have only reproduced these captions once for the sake of brevity.

[3] There is a significant discrepancy between Houël's use of the term *béké* in the Creole version and her translation of it as *chic* in Standard French. *Béké* is a creole term meaning white (it has a slightly critical or derogatory edge without being considered offensive), and it is often left untranslated in French writing. Houël's rewriting of this term as "chic" in French removes the racial connotations of this term, instead only referencing socioeconomic class. An elevated social status can also be encapsulated in the term *béké* as the colonial class structure in the Caribbean instantiated a white creole elite. Because it is difficult to find an English equivalent that captures the racial and class nuances of *béké*, I have kept Houël's use of "chic," which is has been conveniently imported from French in English and added the modifier of "white" outside of the quotation marks to maintain the unambiguous racial meaning of *béké*.

Chacun son tou

Hié c'étai ou, — jodi cé nous — Pa jalou chè — en ce bas monde, — chacun son tou ! — Quan ou té jeune — pa té ni con-re — pou té brenné có dans *biguine* — et pou té cho en carnaval.

Si sang ou fouédi dans veine ou — cé pa raison pour nous qui jeunes — nous trouvé nous dans même l'état — Puisqu'jeunesse poko quitté nous — pouqui ou lé nous quitté li ! — Non, ché, l'heu nous poko sonné — pou nous chanté *miserere* — fai « *c'est ma faute, ma très grande faute !* » — Ça bon pou ça qui ja flétri : — *La fleur fanée ne renaît pas !* — Consolé co-re bo bénitier — épi côté confessionnal. — Hié c'étai ou, jodi cé nous : — chacun son tou en ce ba monde !

Chacun son tour

Hier, c'était toi, aujourd'hui, nous: — Il ne faut pas être jalouse : — en ce bas monde, chacun son tour. — Il paraît qu'en ton jeune temps, — on te citait à la *biguine* — pour tes mouvements provocants. — Nulle, plus que toi, au carnaval, — n'était fringante dans le plaisir. — Si aujourd'hui ton sang se glace, — jeunesse pour cela n'est point morte, — et puisqu'elle nous demeure encore — pourquoi lui dirions-nous adieu ! — Notre heure, à nous, n'a pas sonné — de chanter le *miserere* — et de nous frapper la poitrine d'un *c'est ma faute, ma très grande faute*. — Laissons cela aux visages flétris — *La fleur fanée ne renaît pas.* — Console-toi près des bénitiers — et au bord des confessionnaux. — Aujourd'hui toi, et demain nous : chacun son tour en ce bas monde !

Each Has Their Turn

Yesterday, it was you, — today, us — No need to be jealous, dear — in this base world, — each has their turn! — It seems at your young age — you were given the *biguine* — for your provocative movements. — No one, more than you, at Carnaval, — was as elegant in your pleasure.

If today your blood froze — youth would still not be dead from that — because it still resides in us — why should we say goodbye to it! — No, dear, our time, for us, has not yet come — to sing the *Miserere* — and to beat our chests with *"through my fault, through my most grievous fault."* — Leave that to those with withered faces: — *The wilted flower will not be reborn!* — Console yourself at the basins of holy water — and by the confessionals. — Today you, and tomorrow us: — each has their turn in this base world![4]

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[4] The adjective *fringante*, which I've translated as *elegant* is grammatically feminine in Houël's French version, implying that the addressee is a woman. The creole version uses the adjective *cho*, meaning *chaud* instead (not gendered in Creole). In French, the adjective *chaud* literally means hot, but when applied to a person in this manner can have the connotation of sexual arousal. While Houël cites the *Miserere* (psalm 50), the quotation is from a different prayer, the *Confiteor*, which is recited at confession.

Adieu bonheu' !

Zombi boué dans canari-moin ! — adieu bonheu ! fini l'amou ! — Moin blié li dérho la nuit, — la pluie tombé, rempli li d'lo, — zombi passé, boué adan li, — pa ni plaisi pou moin enco !…

Cé dépi ça, belle z'amie-moin — ka touné tête pou pa voué moin — li poutant qui té aimé moin — con jadin aimé la rosée, — jodi, trouvé y rhaï moin, — con chauve-souris rhaï gran jou !… — Ça moin fai bon Dieu, magré ça ! — pou li laissé zombi vini — la nuite, boué dans canari moin ! — Yo ka di moin « Bon coeu-r conça ! — allé plutôt roué z'affai vous — au lieu ou rété malheureu — con ti z'ouézo qui sans papa, — ester fragile, lavande ambrée, — pa ka manqué toutes sotes bagages pou ramené l'amou vini.

Esse moin lé besoin sotilège — pou té rouvé coeur z'amie moin ! — esse moin jamai ba li bouè philtre — afin fai li fai moin zieux doux ! — Estèr fragile, lavande ambrée, — gadé pou zottes, remèdes con ça. — L'amou moin lé, cé pa tou ça — l'amou, moin lé, en véité ! — cé yon l'amou sans zinglin-glin, — cé bon l'amou bon Dieu créé.

Zombi boué dans canari-moin! — Adieu l'amou ! adieu bonheu !

Adieu Bonheur !

Djinn a bu dans mon *canari* ! — Adieu bonheur ! fini l'amour ! — Je l'avais oublié dehors, — où il resta toute la nuit, — le djinn passa et but dedans : — pour moi, jamais plus de plaisir !

C'est depuis, que ma belle amie — détourne la tête quand elle me voit. — Elle, qui pourtant m'aimait jadis, — comme le jardin aime la rosée ! — aujourd'hui, voilà qu'elle me hait — comme la chauve-souris, la lumière. — Qu'ai-je fait au bon Dieu, tout de même ! — pour qu'il ait laissé boire le djinn — toute la nuit dans mon *canari* !

Les gens me disent ! « Tu es bien bon ! — au lieu de rester en détresse — comme un petit oiseau orphelin — va plutôt voir à tes affaires ; — l'*ester fragile* et la *lavande* — sont des plantes qui ont des vertus — pour ramener l'amour parti. »

Ai-je eu besoin de sortilège — pour m'ouvrir le coeur de ma mie ! — lui ai-je jamais donné un philtre — pour qu'elle me regarde tendrement ?… — *Ester fragile, lavande ambrée !*… — gardez pour vous tous ces remèdes, — l'amour que je veux, croyez-moi, — c'est un amour sans maléfices — le bon amour créé par Dieu.

Djinn a bu dans mon canari. — Adieu l'amour ! Adieu bonheur !

Goodbye Happiness!

The zombie drank from my water pot! — Goodbye happiness! So long love! — I forgot it outside, — where the rain refilled it — the zombie came by and drank from it: — for me, there will never again be pleasure!...

Since then, my beautiful girlfriend — turns her head away when she sees me — She who used to love me — like the garden loves the dawn, — today, she seems to hate me, — like the bat hates the light!... — What have I done, my good God, all the same! — in having allowed the zombie to spend — the entire night drinking from my pot! — People tell me, "You're just fine, man! — Instead of letting yourself worry — like a little orphaned bird, — go tend to your business. — fragile ester, amber lavender — are plants that hold the virtue — of reviving lapsed love."

Would I have needed a magic spell — to open the heart of my love! — would I have given her a potion — to make her give me a tender look! — Fragile ester, amber lavender, — keep all these remedies for yourselves. — The love I want, believe me, — is a love without evil spells — a holy love created by God.

The zombie drank from my water pot! — Goodbye happiness! Goodbye love! [5]

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[5] The French version in the Autrement Mêmes publication labels the supernatural creature as "le lutin" and "le farfadet," meaning goblin and imp. These terms reinscribe the poem in a European mythology instead of the Caribbean folk culture surrounding the zombie figure. Interestingly, the Paris archival version has this creature translated as "djinn," a spirit from Islamic folklore sometimes translated as "genie." This terminology transports the poem into another orientalist context that is neither French nor Antillean. I have restored the text of this poem as it was originally published based on the Paris archival copy. In my English translation, I have chosen to use the term "zombie" from the Creole version, as this poem clearly references beliefs from Caribbean folk cultures surrounding the figure of the zombie. Houël leaves the Creole term *canari*, meaning a jug of water, untranslated, but I have translated this for clarity. In terms of gendering, the speaker of the poem is referred to with masculine grammatical gendering, "tu es bien bon," in the Standard French translation (the creole version lacks a grammatical gender; in French, the masculine adjective *bon* means good or fine). I have chosen to mark this by adding the gendered address of "man" where the French version simply uses a masculine gendered form. This preserves the indication that Houël wrote this poem that addresses a female beloved from a masculine gendered perspective.

Philtre d'amour

Moin trouvé dans fond potiche moin — yon philtre d'amou, l'amou, metté ! — Ou save, poutant chè l'amou-moin — plus bon philtre là, ou save li bien, — cé pa ta qui dans potiche là, — plus bon philtre-là, cé deux zieux vou — qui ka ranne moin con papillon — devant chandelle qui ka clairé !… — cé belle cheveure, chè tréso moin ! — qui prend coeu moin — con yon filet ka prend poisson ; — qui vloppé li con soie maïs — ka emmailloté z'épi-li ! — Plus bon philtre là, tanne, l'amou moin ! — cé baisers vou qui dou pon bouche — con pomme cannelle pou sucrier… — Cé pa la peine, cé pède temps vou — que metté philtre dans potiche moin. — Châme là cé ou, chez z'amie moin ! — pa allé chèché li ailleu…

Philtre d'amour

J'ai trouvé dans ma potiche, — un philtre d'amour qu'y mit l'amour !... — Tu sais pourtant, tu le sais bien, — le meilleur philtre, mon cher amour, — n'est pas celui de la potiche : — ce sont tes yeux, mon cher amour ! — tes deux yeux qui me rendent pareil — au papillon devant la lampe ! — c'est ta chevelure qui prend mon coeur — comme le filet prend le poisson ! — qui l'enveloppe comme le maïs — se trouve enveloppé dans ses soies. — Le meilleur philtre, mon cher trésor, — c'est ton baiser, dont la saveur — est aussi aimée de ma bouche — que la pomme-cannelle de l'oiseau ! — Je te le dis, c'est perdre ton temps — que mettre des philtres dans ma potiche. — Le charme c'est toi, ma bien-aimée ! — ne va pas le chercher ailleurs.

Love Potion

I found inside of my vial — a love potion! — you know this, however my dear love — the best potion, as you well know, — is not the one from the vial, — it's your eyes — your two eyes that make me — a butterfly in front of a lamp!... — it's your lock of hair, my dear treasure! — that captures my heart— like a hook catches a fish; — that envelops it like corn — finds itself enveloped in its silks! — the best potion, my love! — is your kiss, which my mouth — loves as much as the bird's sugar apple… — telling you is a waste of your time — like putting potions in my vial. — You are the charm, my beloved! — don't go looking for it elsewhere…[6]

[6] For a discussion of the translation and my reading of this poem, particularly the gendering of the beloved, see Chapter 2. In my English translation, I have resituated the iterations of "dear love / dear treasure" to more closely align with the Creole version.

Mieux sé vo mô

(Poème nègre)

Chè l'amou moin di moin con ça : — « Ou qui ka fai coeumoin brenné, — quan moin ka vouè-re, bel tréso moin, — con *macula* dans vent midi, — si jamai jou-là doué clairé — où ou doué vini moin perfide, — si jamai l'heu-là doué sonné — pou ou trahi pauve z'ami vou — de grâce, pas quitté deux zieux moin — connaîte couleu jou modi-là !

Epi cheveu-re moin tant aimé — qui con la soie, en ba douètes moin — fai yon collier l'entou cou moin — qui ké docile en ba la main-re — alosse même que i ké cruelle, — épi serré, jus quan ou voué — moin fini vive assous rega-re.

Malgré tout, mort-là ka lé dou — dans cheveu-re ki ké senti bon — et dans cendre qui poko ké fouète — de l'amou nous, à peine fini !

Plutôt mourir !

(Traduction)

Mon cher amour m'a dit comme cela : « — Toi, dont la vue remue mon coeur, — comme la fève du *macula*, — quand passe le souffle de midi, — si jamais, ce jour allait luire — où tu me deviendrais perfide, — si jamais l'heure devait sonner — où tu trahirais notre amour, — ne laisse pas, je t'en supplie, — mes deux yeux connaître la couleur — de ce jour à jamais maudit !

Je veux qu'avec tes chers cheveux — doux à mes doigts comme la soie — tu fasses à mon cou docile — même sous tes mains, alors cruelles — un collier que tu serreras — jusqu'à ce que s'en aille ma vie — que, sous ton regard, je trépasse !

Douce quand même me sera la mort — dans ta chevelure qui m'embaumera — et dans les cendres, à peine éteintes, — de notre amour qui se termine ! »

Better to die!

This what my dear love told me: — “You, whose sight stirs my heart, — like the bean of the *macula* in a gust of noon, — if ever the day would shine — when you began to appear treacherous to me, — if ever the time would come — when you betrayed my love — I beg you to never let — my two eyes know the color — of that ever cursed day!

I want your dear hair — soft as silk to my fingers — that you place on my docile neck — and with your therefore cruel hands — a chain that you tighten until with my departing life — under your gaze, I perish.

Even so, death would be tender to me — with your locks of hair embalming me — in the barely extinguished ashes — of our now expiring love![7]

[7] In the Standard French version, the “dear love” is gendered masculine, whereas the “You” addressed is feminine, implying a heterosexual coupling. I have chosen to translate the term *collier* as chain to capture some of the ambiguity and nuance of this term, which can mean necklace, collar, or yoke, having both the connotations of delicate feminine jewelry, and the violent associations of slavery. The final line of the French translation, “notre amour qui se termine” states that the love is in the process of ending, whereas the Creole version, “l’amou nous, à peine fini,” instead would be translated as “our barely finished love,” a more ambiguous ending that implies the love may not yet be over.