COASTAL COSMOPOLITANISM AND MODERNIST WOMEN POETS OF THE TRANSNATIONAL SOUTH

by

SARAH GRACE HARRELL

(Under the Direction of Susan Rosenbaum)

ABSTRACT

My dissertation, "Coastal Cosmopolitanism and Modernist Women Poets of the Transnational South," uncovers a pathbreaking network of women poets writing during the interwar period from cosmopolitan centers along the southeastern coasts of the United States and nearby Caribbean islands. Using a *transnational* lens to expand the regional and gendered boundaries that have traditionally shaped the canon of modernist poetry, I focus on six women poets writing from cosmopolitan centers in the South Atlantic, namely Washington, D.C., Charleston, South Carolina, Key West, Florida, and Kingston, Jamaica. The coastal geographies of these maritime cities—often considered part of the "circumCaribbean," areas of the United States and the Caribbean that share important geographical and cultural similarities—fostered a dynamic intersection of local, regional, and global ideologies. The project draws on extensive archival research of these poets' previously unexamined poems, letters, and diaries, illuminating how their literary careers developed out of domestic and international cultural movements in the circumCaribbean. My work not only responds to the double marginalization of women poets writing from the southern region, but also allows for a more complex understanding of the way

cosmopolitanism in the South Atlantic shaped literary constructs of locality, regionalism, and nationhood in American modernism.

INDEX WORDS: modernism, women poets, coastal, transnational, cosmopolitanism, circumCaribbean, U.S. South, Charleston Renaissance, Harlem Renaissance, Southern Renaissance, Caribbean literature, Elizabeth Bishop, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Una Marson, Beatrice Ravenel, Anne Spencer

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DEDICATION

For my mother and father

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation, "Coastal Cosmopolitanism and Modernist Women Poets of the Transnational South," uncovers a new network of women poets writing during the interwar period from locations along the southeastern coasts of the United States and the Caribbean. I situate this project within globalizing frameworks of current literary criticism in Modernist Studies, American Studies, and Southern Studies. Using a range of transnational templates to expand the regional and gendered boundaries that have traditionally shaped the canon of modernist poetry, I focus on six women poets writing from cosmopolitan centers in the Atlantic, namely Charleston, South Carolina; Washington, D.C.; Key West, Florida; and Kingston, Jamaica. The coastal geographies of these maritime cities—often considered part of the "circumCaribbean," areas of the United States and the Caribbean that share important geographical and cultural similarities—fostered a dynamic intersection of local, regional, and global ideologies. The project draws on extensive archival research of these poets' previously unexamined poems, letters, and diaries, illuminating how their literary careers developed out of domestic and international cultural movements in the circumCaribbean. My dissertation responds to the double marginalization of women poets writing from the southern region in order to allow for a more complex understanding of the way cosmopolitanism in the South Atlantic shaped literary constructs of locality, regionalism, and nationhood in American modernism.

Chapter 1, "'Interpreters of the sea!': Historic Preservation and Women Poets of the Charleston Renaissance," examines the poetry of Josephine Pinckney and Beatrice Ravenel, who were members of the Poetry Society of South Carolina, a literary organization affiliated with

what is now known as the Charleston Renaissance, a period of heightened cultural and artistic activity that took place in South Carolina roughly between 1915 and 1940. Pinckney and Ravenel collaborated with vast networks of female literary and cultural workers in Charleston and in other parts of the U.S., including Harriet Monroe and Amy Lowell. While Pinckney and Ravenel each published only a single volume of poetry—Ravenel's *The Arrow of Lightning* in 1925, and Pinckney's *Sea-Drinking Cities* in 1927—their work significantly departs from the traditional poetic forms and subject matter seen in the work of their South Carolina colleagues. The predominant subjects and themes of their work—namely relationships between architectural space and the irretrievable past, South Carolina's historically suppressed ties to the Caribbean, and narratives written from the historical point of view of colonial subjects from the social margins—reflect the influences of their contact with other modernist writers across the country, but more significantly, the influence of these poets' close geographical and professional alliances with Charleston's early historic preservation movement during the 1920s. Specifically, I argue that their work's revisionist treatments of the past correspond with the innovative architectural salvage techniques employed by Charleston's early female-led historic preservation movement. The female poets and preservation workers associated with the Charleston Renaissance exhibit remarkably similar shifts in their aesthetic and historicist attitudes toward the past, challenging conventional preservationist assumptions about factual verification and stable constructs of nationhood; these women investigate, challenge, and rewrite romanticized narratives of the past that predominated standard touristic and promotional narratives of the city.

While my primary focus in this chapter is on aesthetic and ideological parallels between South Carolina's literary and preservation movements, I also investigate the paternalistic racial politics that shaped Pinckney's and Ravenel's work as well as that of other writers and cultural

producers affiliated with the Charleston Renaissance. Even though many of the poets affiliated with the Poetry Society of South Carolina associated with writers connected with the Harlem Renaissance during their travels in northern parts of the U.S. and abroad, African American poets were excluded from the organization—ironically, however, African Americans were a central subject in the work of the South Carolina poets. Investigating the racial politics of discrimination, appropriation, and minstrelsy underlying the literary activities of the Charleston Renaissance shows how race and region complicate Pinckney's and Ravenel's more progressive stances on gender. An examination of women's poetry from this literary movement brings attention to a neglected group of poets from the U.S. South and reveals how modernist women poets questioned, challenged, and revised traditional historical narratives of nation-building and U.S. ties to the Caribbean.

In Chapter 2, "'Contactual inspiration': Classic Blues and Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance," I examine the literary careers of Harlem Renaissance poets Georgia Douglas Johnson, who lived in Washington, D.C., and Anne Spencer, who lived in Lynchburg, Virginia, alongside the unprecedented emergence of celebrity female blues singers. By way of their own blues-inflected poetry and their sponsorships of two of the most significant literary salons in early twentieth- century African American culture, Johnson and Spencer helped launch a movement of Afro- modernist blues poetry that corresponded with the blueswomen's entertainment circuit throughout the urban South. The most widely recognized blues poets of the period, including Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and Sterling Brown, had their beginnings in the late-night exchanges that took place in these salons. Johnson led a literary organization known as the "Saturday Nighters Club," the longest-running and most widely respected literary salon connected with the Harlem Renaissance, from her home in Washington, D.C.'s black

entertainment district from 1921 into the 1940s. Spencer, who ran a smaller and less well-known literary salon from her home in Lynchburg, Virginia during the 1920s and 1930s, was also a central member of the Saturday Nighters Club. Like the performance space of classic blues artists such as "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith, the ephemeral, yet collective, nature of these salon gatherings—what Johnson referred to as "contactual inspiration"— were alternative public spaces marked by female leadership and political, sexual, and socioeconomic diversity.

In this chapter, I trace correspondences between Johnson's and Spencer's own poetry and the musical modernism of the classic blues that developed out of Washington, D.C. and throughout the Deep South, opening new interpretive strategies that reveal their poetry's rhetorical and thematic resonances with the lyrics written and performed by female classic blues artists, namely Rainey and Smith. The subjects, themes, and subtextual narratives of their poetry—in particular, their treatments of female sexuality, working-class African American women, and other marginalized groups—correspond with the Afro-feminist lyrics of many classic blues songs. This chapter complicates traditionally Harlem-centered narratives of cultural traffic in black modernism; furthermore, it charts women's supportive and lyrical contributions to what is conventionally perceived as an exclusively male-authored blues aesthetic, in turn prompting us to rethink the strict aesthetic and ideological dichotomies traditionally drawn between African American women's literary and performance cultures, or "high" and "low" art, during the early twentieth century.

Chapter 3, "Una Marson, Elizabeth Bishop, and Tourist Archipelagoes of the circumCaribbean," situates the poets Elizabeth Bishop and Una Marson, two transnational "Southern" poets born outside the southern region of the U.S., within broader discussions of the Global South. In this chapter, I trace important similarities in the way both poets respond to

geocultural, historical, and economic issues particular to the intertropical region of the circumCaribbean. Bishop lived in Key West, Florida and later Brazil for a total of thirty years, while Marson migrated between Kingston, Jamaica and London for over thirty years before eventually setting up residence in Washington, D.C. As residents of popular travel destinations in the Caribbean basin, both poets were attuned to the realities of economic exploitation and racial oppression erased from popular touristic narratives that reinforced Eurocentric mythologies of islands as suspended in time and, by extension, outside the encroachments of modernity. Through subtle manipulation of closed and traditional verse forms, use of inter- and intratextual dialogic sequence, and revisionist treatments of the imperial picturesque, their poetry undermines colonial perspectives by illuminating blind spots in the Euro-American tourist gaze. Examining Marson's and Bishop's poetry together uncovers significant correspondences between women poets affiliated with U.S. modernist literature during the Great Depression and with the early years of Caribbean literary nationalism during the 1930s. The geospatial frameworks of the transnational South and circumCaribbean allows us to observe fundamental similarities between these two seemingly very different poets.

This dissertation is as much a project aimed at recovering poets largely unknown in the field of Modernist Studies as it is an investigation of new relationships and overlooked historical contexts regarding canonical poets. Modernist women poets from the U.S. South and circumCaribbean have been virtually excluded from scholarship on American and transAtlantic literary modernism. There have, however, been recent scholarly and curatorial projects reclaiming women visual artists from the U.S. South in related studies of American modern art. As art historian Daniel Belasco asserts, "The topic of modernism and Southern women artists remains little explored to this day. The very category of Southern female modern artists clusters

so many marginal identities that it explodes binary thinking" (53).[1] This dissertation collapses regional and canonical binaries that have neglected Southern women poets in studies of American modernist poetry; it also challenges simplistic paradigms of nationhood and the American South, which do not take into account fundamental overlaps between American and Caribbean women's poetry during the early twentieth century. Many of the lesser known poets I examine have been relegated to literary footnotes, or overlooked altogether, in Modernist Studies due to conventional narratives of modernity that continue to shape assumptions regarding genre, nationality, and geography in the field. The recovery of less well-known women poets broadens our awareness of who modernism's cultural creators were and the nature of their literary concerns. Examining marginalized women poets, such as Marson, alongside central figures in the canon of American modernist poetry, such as Bishop, complicates how we look for and interpret routes of connection between modernist women writers across national borders.

My recovery of overlooked women poets and examination of modern poetry's transnational connections across the U.S. South and circumCaribbean are in the spirit of, as Walter Kalaidjian calls the multidirectional expansions in the "New Modernist Studies," supporting a more "democratic conversation" (2) in literary scholarship. Scholars working in the New Modernist Studies—whose inception coincided with that of the "transnational turn" throughout the wider humanities—have increasingly shifted their attention toward writers and other cultural workers from regions, nations, and territories traditionally overlooked in studies of modernism's global and cross-cultural networks. Regarding recent scholarship on modernist poetry, critics in that subfield, too, are looking beyond, as Rebecca Walsh posits, "the familiar New York-London-Paris emplotments" (8) in studies of modernist literature. The focal poets of

[1] Belasco, David. "Eyes Wide Open: Modernist Women Artists in the South." *Central to Their Lives: Southern Women Artists in the Johnson Collection*. Ed. Lynne Blackman. U of South Carolina P, 2018. 53-62.

this dissertation, hailing from critically neglected geographic locales, highlight the aesthetic and cultural diversity of modernist women's poetry from the transnational South.

Looking at poets from the U.S. South and the Caribbean through a transnational lens draws attention to the porousness of modernism's national and regional borders. The central geospatial frameworks of this study, the *transnational South* and *circumCaribbean*, are indebted to recent work by literary scholars whose analyses and applications of those comparative schemas have fundamentally altered critical approaches to literatures of the Americas; while I refer to a variety of literary critics whose studies are cross-cultural in nature, the project's transnational and circumCaribbean paradigms are drawn chiefly from the work of scholars in the fields of U.S. Southern literature, African American literature, and Caribbean literature, in particular John Wharton Lowe, Keith Cartwright, Angela Naimou, Brian Ward, and Jessica Abrams. [2] The cross-cultural dimensions of my study, Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 in particular, also draw from the work of postcolonial theorists, principally Chris Bongie, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Édouard Glissant, Simon Gikandi, and Wilson Harris. [3] I use these cross-border strategies and relational models of geography to bridge the gap between scholarship on modern American poetry, Southern literature, and Caribbean literature.

My investigation of modern women poets through a transnational paradigm highlights crucial connections among writers affiliated—though often peripherally—with literary and

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[2] Lowe, John Wharton. *Calypso Magnolia: The Crosscurrents of Caribbean and Southern Literature*. U of North Carolina P, 2016; Cartwright, Keith. *Sacral Grooves, Limbo Gateways: Travels in Deep Southern Time, Circum-Caribbean Space, Afro-creole Authority*. U of Georgia P, 2013; Naimou, Angela. *Salvage Work: U.S. and Caribbean Literatures Amid the Debris of Legal Personhood*. Fordham UP, 2015; Ward, Brian. "Introduction." *The American South and the Atlantic World*, edited by Brian Ward, Martyn Bone, and William A. Link. UP of Florida, 2013; Abrams, Jessica. "Introduction." *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South,* edited by Jessica Abrams, Michael P. Bibler, and Cécile Accilien, U of Virginia P, 2007.

[3] Bongie, Chris. *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998; Benítez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Translated by James Maraniss. Durham: Duke UP, 1992; Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997; Gikandi, Simon. *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011; Harris, Wilson. Harris, Wilson, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983.

artistic movements that are rarely examined together in a holistic way. The poets I focus on are connected with seemingly disparate literary groups, namely the Southern Renaissance, Harlem Renaissance, and Caribbean literary nationalism. In this regard, my application of transnationalism as a reading practice corresponds with the methodological concept of mapping employed in recent feminist-oriented criticism of American women's poetry. Current scholarly mappings of American women's poetry, as articulated by Linda A. Kinnahan, "bring neglected locations into visibility, produce surprising links, and offer guides to movement...No map is pure or objective, but can nonetheless be informed, self-aware, and open" (11). My examination of women poets associated with ostensibly unrelated cultural movements underscores the inherent blind spots of static canonical maps.

This study's exclusive focus on women poets recognizes that, at times, women writers' experiences of modernity corresponded with those of their male colleagues, but, in other ways, were also systemically different. Put simply, people gendered female have historically had different experiences from those gendered male, "socially, legally, economically, politically, and psychologically" (DuPlessis 33). My examination of women's poetry also pivots on the understanding that women's perspectives on and responses to modernity were far from homogenous, including their aesthetic choices, ethnic and national orientations, political views, and historical perspectives. However, the transnational framework I use uncovers unanticipated parallels among women poets living in different geographical parts of the Atlantic and immersed in variously complicated social and political contexts. In Modernist Studies, as elsewhere in literary and humanities scholarship, the subject of gender has become more complex and challenging to navigate. Over the past decade, some critics have questioned whether "women's poetry" or "women's literature" is still a relevant category, given the unstable nature of binary

gender constructs. Justifying the continued reclamation of women writers, Kinnahan asserts, "the politics of constructing literary histories is partly the 'history' told by women's poetry" (12).[4] Transnationally-oriented feminist scholarship has worked toward creating a more nuanced account of modern women's literature that recognizes systemic commonalities among women writers, but also recognizes crucial differences.[5] Transnational feminist discourse asserts "a multiperspectival approach to the cultural politics of modernity" (Felski 8) in response to heightened awareness that the "intersection of femininity and modernity plays itself out differentially across the specifics of sociohistorical context" (9).[6] Using an intersectional approach toward gender, I explore the ways in which Southern and circumCaribbean women's poetic engagements with modernity both reflect and transcend heterogeneity markers of race, class, and region.

A central aim of this dissertation is to show that poetry was a crucial component of women's cultural production in the U.S. South and circumCaribbean during the early twentieth century. Since the early 1980s, scholars of U.S. Southern literature as well as African American literature have recovered numerous black and women writers previously omitted from the canons of nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Southern literature. The reclamation of previously unknown or forgotten women writers, particularly authors from the nineteenth century, has also led to wider recognition of prose works beyond the novel. Not unlike the current "vertical" expansions in New Modernist Studies that challenge traditional categories of "literary" and

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[4] Similar arguments made for the continued reclamation of women's poetry: Bonnie Kime Scott contends that the "specter of male co-option" (4) persists, and, accordingly, those working in modernist studies are "obliged to attend more than ever to everyday life, remaining amid, not 'beyond' gender" (4). As Jayne Marek asserts, men's writing during the modernist period was seen as more universal, "an assumption that affects many critical histories to this day" (4), and because "women's experiences, in literary as in other milieus, have differed considerably from those of men's, women's writings often reflect this disparity through theme, writing style, and imagery" (4-5).

[5] For a succinct overview of recent feminist transnational reading practices, see Laura Winkiel's "Gendered Transnationalism in 'The New Modernist Studies.'" *Literature Compass* 10.1 (2013): 38-44.

[6] Felski, Rita. *The Gender of Modernity*. Harvard UP, 1995.

"subliterary" writings, early feminist scholarship on nineteenth-century Southern women authors revealed that a great deal of the South's most important writing was in the form of letters, diaries, and journals, challenging scholars to rethink definitions of "bona fide" literature. Likewise, this project's sustained examination of Southern women's poetry illuminates the historical and literary significance of a genre of writing traditionally overlooked in studies of Southern literature.

Feminist scholarship on modern Southern literature has reclaimed many women authors previously minimized or overlooked in studies of Southern Modernism, or the Southern Renaissance. The bulk of scholarship on twentieth-century women writers from the U.S. South has tended to focus on white modernist and proto-modernist female novelists, including Kate Chopin, Ellen Glasgow, Caroline Gordon, Julia Peterkin, Frances Newman, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Zelda Fitzgerald, and Katherine Anne Porter; in recent decades, however, female African American writer Zora Neale Hurston has frequently been examined alongside many these writers.[7] While studies of modern women novelists from the South have typically included more white than black women writers, widespread critical interest in Hurston has caused a ripple-effect in the fields of Southern literature and Modernist Studies, which are progressively broadening in transnational and demographic scope. Thanks to decades of literary scholars' recovery efforts, Hurston's life and writing "demonstrate that the Southern Renaissance wasn't just a white Southern literary phenomenon" (Cooper 58) and that Southern women modernists also wrote from and wrote about the circumCaribbean. While studies of other African

[7] Examples of early feminist scholarship on modern Southern writers include: Anne Goodwyn Jones's *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (1981), Louise Westling's *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor (1985), Helen Taylor's Gender, Race, and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Kate Chopin (1989),* Minrose Gwin's *Black and White Women of the Old South: The Peculiar Sisterhood in American Literature* (1985), and Elizabeth Harrison's *Female Pastoral: Women Writers Re-visioning the American South* (1991).

American women modernists have been comparatively few, there have been some notable discussions of late nineteenth and turn-of-the-century black female writers, such as Anna Julia Cooper and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, in recent feminist scholarship that has worked to expand the temporal parameters that have traditionally defined the Southern Renaissance.[8]

My application of transnationalism as a comparative reading practice explores interconnections across cultural movements and historical events both inside and beyond the domestic boundaries of the U.S. as a territorially-bounded nation. Some of the women poets I focus on—Marson, Bishop, and Pinckney—were extensive international travelers, while others—Johnson, Spencer, and Ravenel—experienced more restrictive mobility. Yet in all of these poets' works, we see them engage modernity in ways that fundamentally challenge center-periphery models of cultural practices that "aid in categorizing significant and insignificant (weak or imitative) modernisms" (Winkiel 39) conventionally associated with colonial, racial, and gendered difference. Johnson and Spencer, for instance, played fundamental roles in the creation and dissemination of African American blues poetry through the literary salons they organized from their homes in Washington, D.C. and Lynchburg, Virginia. An examination of their influence as cultural sponsors, as well as their own blues-inflected poetry, complicates Harlem-centered narratives of black literary modernism. In surveying recent scholarly formulations of transnationalism and their implications for the study of modernist women writers, Laura Winkiel notes that transnationalism denotes more than just the "international character of modernism" (38). Instead, the term "emphasizes more fluid and flexible movements,

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[8] Perry, Caroline, and Carol S. Manning. "Southern Women Writers and the Beginning of the Renaissance." *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, edited by Carolyn Perry and Mary Weaks-Baxter. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2002.
For a multifaceted study of late nineteenth and turn-of-the-century African American writers, including Southern and proto-modernist black women authors associated with the Woman's Era, see the collection of critical essays, *Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem: African American Literature and Culture*, *1877-1919*, edited by Barbara McCaskill and Caroline Gebhard. New York: New York UP, 2006.

borrowings, and affiliations within and across national spaces, both in terms of artists and writers themselves and in terms of the flow of ideas, artifacts, and aesthetic movements" (38). While the women poets I focus on in this study exhibit different degrees of international engagement, the transnational framework I use helps to show that, even within a specified nation, region, or city district, boundaries between the local and the global always blur.

The key poets of this study, and the coastal networks they bring into relief, by no means represent the full geographical, aesthetic, or ethnocultural scope of modern women's poetry from the circumCaribbean and U.S. Southern region. Rather, this network of poets serves as a granular study of the ways in which modern globalization and cross-cultural influence differentially manifest along transnational, interregional, and translocal routes. As Brian Ward asserts, "granular" scholarly approaches to relationships between the U.S. South and Atlantic World are particularly useful because they "challenge exceptionalist narratives about the region without ignoring that each locale is in some way distinctive but never immune or isolated from transnational currents" (6). My investigation of women's poetry from the transnational South fosters a more complex understanding of the symbiotic relationships among modern American poetry's local and global contexts, and excavates women modernists' aesthetic and historical ties across both familiar and uncharted terrains.

This dissertation's post-exceptionalist perspective toward nation and region facilitate a more nuanced understanding of how women's poetry written from seemingly disparate parts of the Atlantic meaningfully fit within a geospatially "Southern" template. The inclusion of writers who were born within the U.S. southern region as well as others who were born outside the conventionally understood parameters of the U.S. South demonstrates that territorial borders and identities are multilayered, fluid, and transient. As John Lowe contends with regard to studies of

U.S. Southern literature, "Southern literature and culture have always transcended the physical boundaries of a geographical South," and as such, "it is high time to quit worrying about where writers were born, how long they lived in the South, or if there is a static 'Southernness' that needs attention" (6). The two poets I examine in Chapter 3, Marson and Bishop, most clearly illustrate the tenuousness of "native" status based on exceptionalist constructs of region, nation, and empire. In Marson's poetry about Jamaica—a historically British colony—and Bishop's poetry about Key West—a territorial extension of Florida and the U.S.—we see shared concerns regarding the prevalence of racial stereotypes in, and the erasure of colonial violence from, popular touristic and historical narratives about Caribbean islands. Neither Marson nor Bishop fits within the traditional definition of a "Southern" writer, and yet the global linkages between their works' local subjects and contexts emphatically underscore the arbitrariness of birthplace and citizenship in literary studies of the circumCaribbean.

The influence of Atlantic coastlines on the six poets I focus on in this dissertation exemplifies the delicate interplay of local and global cultural influences on modern women writers from the southeastern U.S. and circumCaribbean. By definition, coastal cultures are "local in context and global in connection" (Allen, Groom, and Smith 4), yet the specific coastal sites represented in this study, however, provide a simultaneously magnified and panoramic look at local and transnational cross-currents that give Southern women's modernity its own distinctively fluid form. As articulated by Nicholas Allen, Nick Groom, and Jos Smith, the coastline "challenges and stretches the notion of place; exposes it as it describes its circumference; opens the intensely local up to the trans-local, to the archipelagic, at one and the same time, *both* a sense of place and a sense of planet" (7). In light of this study's granular approach to southern coastal poets in this project, we might compare transnationalism as a

reading practice to the counterintuitive principle known by cartographers as the *coastline paradox*, which asserts that it is impossible to measure the true length of a coastline.[9] The more closely you examine one, the more infinitely detailed it becomes, since coastlines, as a geographical phenomenon, are teeming with irregularly shaped nooks and crannies and are continuously resculpted by the oceanic environment. As a reading practice, transnationalism operates similarly in that the closer one looks at a particular person, group, culture, or historical event, the more infinitely complex and distinctive each locale becomes, even as it shares similar features with other locations.

My examination of these women's literary networks and careers also deepens our understanding of American modernism's periodical and institutional cultures. Some of these poets were connected with literary modernism's most powerful establishments and networks; some cultivated their literary careers by way of local, homegrown organizations and publications; some straddled multiple, at times ideologically competing, institutions and communities. Whether the literary and creative networks in which they circulated were large or small in scale, their experiences within and perspectives on modernism's cultural institutions were often complicated by gender, race, colonialism, and sexuality. In Modernist Studies, scholarship on women writers, queer writers, and writers of color, has been particularly enriched by more sustained examinations of cultural organizations and group affinities that intersected or competed with, and sometimes operated in the shadows of, powerful academic institutions. With regard to modernist women writers, Karin Roffman contends, "the story of the development of

[9] The coastline paradox, as a cartographic principle, largely developed out of mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot's ideas on fractal geometry. See Nicholas Allen's, Nick Groom's, and Jos Smith's discussion of Mandelbrot's ideas in relation to the coastal regions of Ireland and Britain in their introduction to *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017, pgs. 1-2. For a discussion of the fractal nature of island coastlines and its implications for the emergent field of Archipelagic American Studies, see Brian Russell Roberts's and Michelle Ann Stephens's "Archipelagic American Studies: Decontinentalizing the Study of American Culture," *Archipelagic American Studies*, ed. Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, Durham: Duke, 2017.

American modernist literature has been told alongside the story of the rise of the university at the expense of the very institutions that early twentieth-century women used much more" (3).[10] A closely related, equally crucial development in Modernist Studies has been more focused attention on periodical culture and the marketing of literary modernism, namely little magazines, women/minority editors, and periodical culture's sociological, historical, and commercial contexts.[11] All of the poets examined in this project participated, either directly and indirectly, in periodical culture; their roles as creators, distributors, and consumers of periodical artifacts occurred within a variety of other cultural institutions and organizations, including literary salons, performance spaces, radio broadcasting networks, museums, and libraries.

An examination of the cultural and publication networks connected with Southern/circumCaribbeean women poets foregrounds a number of neglected historical contexts relating to Southern modernism. For example, in Chapter 1, I argue that shifting views of local historiography in South Carolina's female-lead early historic preservation movement during the early twentieth century resonate with revisionist treatments of the past in women's poetry of the Charleston Renaissance. The women poets I examine in Chapter 2 were not closely tied to the authoritative cultural center of Howard University, but developed their literary careers through what Johnson called the "contactual inspiration" of salon gatherings.[12] In that chapter, I demonstrate ideological and aesthetic parallels between salons organized and poetry written by Harlem Renaissance women poets and the democratic, Afro-feminist ethos of the classic blues. The tropical tourism industries I discuss in Chapter 3, though seemingly unconnected to modern

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[10] Roffman, Karin. *From the Modernist Annex: American Women Writers in Museums and Libraries*. U of Alabama P, 2010.

[11] See Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKible, *Little Magazines & Modernism: New Approaches* (2007); Jayne Marek, *Women Editing Modernism* (1995)

[12] Elizabeth McHenry offers a groundbreaking study of Johnson's Washington, D.C. literary salon and its significance to the history of African American literary organizations in *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost Histories of African American Literary Societies* (2002).

poetry's traditionally conceived institutional contexts, perpetuated Eurocentric mythologies that Marson and Bishop challenge in their treatments of Caribbean islands.

My exclusive focus on poetry reveals how women poets from the U.S. South and circumCaribbean manipulate poetry's paradoxical qualities of compactness and flexibility to question and revise literary discourses, historical narratives, and nationalist assumptions. Many of the poets I examine use predominantly traditional and closed forms, although some of them also employ more recognizably experimental forms. At times, these poets' work exhibits the solipsistic narratives typically aligned with literary modernism, yet their writing just as often features polyvocal and relational perspectives. Scholarship on American modernist literature and modern Southern literature still overwhelmingly focus on prose fiction, particularly the novel. Minimal focus on poetry is due in part to widespread assumptions that poetry as a genre is intrinsically restricted to isolated events, local landscapes, and mononational ideologies. In recent years, however, we have seen scholars of literary modernism challenge these assumptions. Due to the intense interest in the relationships between geography and culture that permeated American society during the early twentieth century, Rebecca Walsh argues, "modernist poetry, perhaps above all other literary forms, contains 'nation-crossing' within its very DNA" (6). With regard to modern poetry's global engagements, greater attunement to the way modernist poets catalogue, compare, synthesize, and contrast disparate geographies and discourses, "helps to create a more visible place in the 'New Modernist Studies' for the transnational and global dimensions of poetry" (5).[13] Despite widespread notions that poetry is exclusively inward-looking and therefore sequestered from global concerns, it is in fact *both* self-aware and dialogic, both textually compact and dialogically fluid.

[13] See also Jahan Ramazani's *A Transnational Poetics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015.

Examining these six poets through a transnational lens allows us to see that women's poetry of the U.S. South and circumCaribbean—echoing Chris Bongie's formulation of the Caribbean island—is simultaneously "insular" and "relational" (18). Their poems "speak" individually, but also discursively in relation to other texts, traditions, and cultures; a close look at the complex routes of connection that inform their work fosters a more nuanced understanding of modern women's poetry and its geospatial contexts.

CHAPTER 1

"Interpreters of the Sea!": Preservation and Women's Poetry of the Charleston Renaissance

In a typescript of her personal quandaries on poetry, written sometime in the 1920s, Josephine Pinckney asks, "Can pastoral poetry be truly written – that is, would a modern have a true urge to write about anything so remote as an old farm, unless he writes about it openly as an antique? Would a modern, scientifically run farm provide pastoral poetry?" These are questions that self-identified regionalist poets faced at a time when "modern" and "metropolitan" subject matter appeared to be synonymous. The relentless epistles between the Southern past and its literary inheritors meant that for Southern modernists, reconciling innovation with tradition was an especially monumental task. Even for poets like Pinckney who lived in expanding cosmopolitan centers in the South, tangible vestiges of the Civil War were still a familiar part of the natural and economic landscape. Whether traveling by Model T Ford or on foot, neither residents nor tourists could overlook the desolate farmhouses, abandoned plantations, and combat bulwarks proliferated on the peninsula and its fringe of Sea Islands. Perhaps ruminating on this temporal paradox, Pinckney ultimately hypothesizes, "It seems to be what we have lost, not what we have, that stirs us, -- that we consider 'poetic.'"

Pinckney was a founding member of the Poetry Society of South Carolina, one of many organizations encompassed by the period now known as the Charleston Renaissance, a surge in artistic and cultural activity in South Carolina's historic city roughly dating 1915-1940 (Severens 3). In contrast to other southern cities like Nashville, whose industrial economic recovery turned on a homogenizing transfiguration of the landscape, Charleston's economic upturn during the

interwar period relied on the preservation and promotion of its remoteness. The lowcountry's cultural renaissance derived its immediate momentum from white elite efforts to safeguard historic plantation homes, many of which had belonged to Charleston's oldest families for generations before they were abandoned during the Civil War. Soon after the turn of the twentieth century, the rapid demolishment of historic buildings resulted from exportation of architectural features to private collectors and museums in the North, in addition to the southward encroachment of filling stations in response to the automotive industry (Weyeneth 2-4). Recent scholarly interest in the Charleston Renaissance, however, has shown that the ideologies shaping the city's self-preservation and self-presentation were often incongruent. As James Hutchisson and Harlan Greene state, "The Charleston Renaissance was too complicated to parse; it comprised too many disparate voices—jazz, blackface, modern, classic, and dissonant. Unable to deal with the complexity, the next generation reduced Charleston to a trite rendition of 'Dixie'" (17). Ironically, while the perceived threat of Northerners to South Carolina's civic identity catapulted early preservation efforts, white cultural sponsors from the North played a crucial role in supporting the Renaissance. Those same transplanted cultural activists simultaneously reformed and reinforced aristocratic Carolinians' "operative identity myth" (Yuhl 32) rooted in Southern exceptionalism and white paternalism.

The Poetry Society of South Carolina, now widely recognized as a major catalyst of the Southern Literary Renaissance, was itself initially organized by Northerners who had relocated to the lowcountry. Before becoming an official organization in 1920, the Charleston School, as it was often called, emerged from two informal discussion groups. Laura Bragg, the Massachusetts-born director of the Charleston Museum, led a small poetry workshop in her home, in which Josephine Pinckney was an active participant. John Bennett, an illustrator and

children's book writer from Ohio, hosted a similar group, regularly meeting with DuBose Heyward and Hervey Allen to discuss poetry. Bragg and Bennett, each with connections to influential American writers and publishers outside the South, helped their young protégés to refine their regional poetry by exposing them to modernist verse published in major literary journals, namely Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine. When the two groups merged in 1920, Bennett and Heyward became the Poetry Society's leading organizers and served as chief editors of its yearly annual publication, *The Year Book of the Poetry Society of South Carolina.* The organization's primary aim was to carve out a place for South Carolina's writers in national literary discourse that, since the Civil War, had been almost exclusively relegated to the Northeast.

Requiring the financial backing of Charleston's conservative wealthy sector and the social capital of prominent modernist circles, the Poetry Society had to carefully negotiate public relations with local and national audiences. Marketing membership as a sign of social prestige, the group soon acquired a wealthy membership base, which sponsored generous prizes for poetry contests and visiting lectures from such renowned writers as Carl Sandburg, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Gertrude Stein. Although African-American life was a defining subject of the Charleston School, the PSSC excluded black writers. Jean Toomer's brief membership in 1923 caused great anxiety for the *Year Book*'s editors, who feared the organization's wealthy patrons would withdraw their support if Toomer's race were discovered (Yuhl).[14] Most members

[14] In 1923, Jean Toomer became a non-resident member of the PSSC. In efforts to avoid provoking conservative southern readers or alienating more liberal northern audiences, Bennett and Heyward printed Toomer's name in the 1923 list of memberships without special mention of his widely heralded work, *Cane*, published earlier that year. Toomer's membership went unnoticed, and the following year, his name was simply omitted from the membership pages of the *Year Book* (Yuhl 224-225). The writers of PSSC were certainly familiar with Toomer's book, but were apparently somehow oblivious of Toomer's African-American ancestry. Ironically, Toomer's own aesthetic treatments of Southern and African-American folklore more closely aligned with the poetry of the PSSC than most of the work produced by the non-resident members accepted into the society. Another notable audience-related

"slipped between opposing cultural places" (Greene and Hutchisson 9), including Harlem Renaissance circles, but reverted back to the stricter segregationist practices of "polite society" (12) at home. The literature produced by members of the PSSC charts a significant, though also highly problematic, connection between the Southern and Harlem "Renaissances." At a time when popular and scholarly interests in African-American folklore were, as James Weldon Johnson called it, in "vogue" (Yuhl 136), the PSSC captivated white literati across the United States with "authentic" transcriptions of the Gullah-Geechee language in the dialect poetry its members published during the 1920s. As Hutchisson and Greene have argued, the dialect poetry of the PSSC introduced modern white readers to literature featuring African American life as a serious subject, thus to a degree preparing white audiences for the blues and jazz poetry written by younger members of the Harlem Renaissance; at the same time, the PSSC's exclusion of black writers like Toomer further underscores the racial politics of appropriation and profit at the center of the Charleston Renaissance. Even recent treatments of DuBose Heyward's novel-turned-folk-opera *Porgy*, which met with controversy for its social conscience regarding race and poverty, have revealed the uneasy vacillations between racial pathos and racial minstrelsy among South Carolina writers who closely, but covertly, associated with black modernists.[15]

In addition to poets Heyward and Allen, Josephine Pinckney and Beatrice Witte Ravenel are also important figures in the history of the Poetry Society. Their work was regularly

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incident occurred upon the publication of John Crowe Ransom's "Apocalypse," which was published in a separate pamphlet instead of being included in the *Year Book* for its controversial religious depictions of God and Satan.

[15] The racial politics in Heyward's 1925 novel *Porgy,* as well as Julia Peterkin's 1928 novel *Scarlet Sister Mary* (Peterkin was the only South Carolina writer to have ever received a Pulitzer Prize) have been variously interpreted in recent scholarship. Harlan Greene and James Hutchisson, for instance, contend that *Porgy* and the poetry of the PSSC were "working against the grain" by "writing realistically and sympathetically" of African Americans and working-class whites—Heyward wrote of poor whites living in North Carolina in his 1922 poetry collection *Carolina Chansons: Legends of the Lowcountry*—without resorting to stereotypes (7). Other scholars such as Daniel Singal, Stephanie Yuhl, and Michael North have asserted that, with rare exception, members of the PSSC generally upheld racial stereotypes associated with idealized memories of a benevolent white paternalism; Singal, Yuhl, and North also emphasize that fascination with an African "Other" and racial cross-dressing were defining features of high white modernism.

published in the PSSC *Year Book* and in national literary journals such as *Poetry* and *Contemporary Verse*; yet unlike Heyward and Allen, who collaboratively and individually published multiple books of poetry, Ravenel and Pinckney each produced a single published collection: Ravenel's *The Arrow of Lightning* in 1925, and Pinckney's *Sea-Drinking Cities* in 1927. These two poetry volumes were published soon after the Poetry Society had begun to disband in 1925 when key organizers, Heyward and Allen, left poetry and Charleston behind to concentrate on other writing professions. Pinckney assumed primary leadership that year alongside John Bennett. While the gender dynamics of the PSSC were unusually egalitarian for the time and region, there was a notably stark divide between male leadership positions and female supporting roles during its most active years at the height of the American verve for poetry in the early 1920s. Pinckney's and Ravenel's comparatively small number of published works and subsidiary roles in the PSSC during this time reflect an uneasy negotiation of gendered restrictions and opportunities. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Southern painting and literature were predominantly viewed by other Southerners as dilettante enterprises of the leisured class (Donaldson, "Cracked Urns" 53). After the turn of the century, when writing was becoming more widely respected as a profession, gendered stigmas attached to the arts were still prevalent in the United States, and particularly in the South.

Maintaining the "tradition of women as the custodians of society's artifacts, identity, and welfare" (Yuhl 29), women were the predominant leaders of Charleston's early preservation movement. Throughout the 1920s, preservation became an increasingly professionalized field, due in large part to the city's burgeoning tourist economy and New Woman ideals, although those professions were taken over by men in the 1930s. As Stephanie Yuhl explains, "As long as preservation had remained a voluntary and largely female activity, it was tolerated socially and

women were allowed to remain in leadership positions" (42). During that short-lived, but significant, transitional period, Charleston's "Clubwomen," including both volunteer activists and salaried administrators, steered the early aesthetic and municipal strategies that would eventually become a nationwide paradigm for the historic preservation movement.

In 1920, the same year the Poetry Society became an official organization, Josephine Pinckney's cousin, Susan Pringle Frost, founded the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings. The first woman to open a real estate office in Charleston (Severens 65), Frost was a leading agent of the modern preservation movement, purchasing a number of plantation homes in disrepair to convert into house museums (Weyeneth 11). The SPOD took an exclusive interest in residential buildings, a direct reflection of the preservation movement's early female leadership. As opposed to financial establishments and civic monuments "more often associated with men" (Yuhl 29), domestic spaces were historically associated with women's everyday experiences. In prioritizing such structures, Yuhl argues, the SPOD "asserted the importance of historical continuity through the very personal lens of family and femininity" (Yuhl 29). Put simply, upperclass white women used architectural preservation to insert themselves into an Anglo-American history traditionally defined by men. Financial obstacles, however, often hindered the preservation of complete structures. When the cost of purchasing an entire property was too great, the SPOD resorted to an "adaptive method" (Weyeneth 11), salvaging architectural features for restoration and remodeling projects. Throughout the 1920s, Frost began purchasing low-income dwellings, usually African-American tenement houses, and remodeled them using salvaged features from plantation homes (11). The resulting displacement of low-income African Americans and the subsequent white gentrification of marginal structures were also material

extensions of the complex racial politics that informed Charleston's white preservationist and literary efforts.

Along with Frost's SPOD, Laura Bragg's leadership of the Charleston Museum also significantly shaped preservation activities. The museum provided a repository for salvaged architectural features (Weyeneth 6), with Bragg, the museum's director, playing "a leading role in the overlapping circles of preservationists, writers, and painters in the city" (Donaldson, "Charleston's Racial Politics," 176). For preservationists, the museum's collection of dismantled architectural features signified white antebellum domesticity re-contextualized as fragments of an irretrievable past.

Bragg used the museum as a vehicle to challenge Charleston's traditional racial hierarchies. For two decades, Bragg incrementally worked to change the museum's whites-only policy and attempted, though unsuccessfully, to include exhibitions of African-American artists. White women's attitudes toward race in Charleston's closely overlapping literary and preservation circles were generally not as consistently public or liberal as Bragg's, however. Like Bragg, Pinckney and Ravenel were forward-thinking compared to most Charlestonians when it came to Jim Crow laws. In contrast to Bragg's unapologetic public advocacy, however, Pinckney was a "behind-the-scenes" (Bellows 9) organizer of Charleston's Inter-racial Commission formed during the 1920s and a "quiet player" (9) in support of African-American voting rights in the 1940s and school integration in the 1950s. Her reluctance to publicly associate with African Americans and her fiscal conservatism reflected her deeply engrained patrician values and sense of duty to social expectations of her gender and class, what she referred to as the "Code." In her mind, democracy was the inevitable and ethical destiny of the modern South, though it threatened ostensibly nobler traditions that rested on white supremacy.

Similar to Pinckney's conflicted views toward racial politics, increasingly ambivalent interpretations of the past held by South Carolina's literary and preservation circles reveal that women poets and preservationists of the Charleston Renaissance exhibited markedly similar shifts in their aesthetic and historicist attitudes. Shannon Mattern offers two categories that are useful for examining these parallel cultural changes.[16] Mattern's first term, "preservation of aesthetics," which refers to traditional systems of assessing and preserving the "'intrinsic value' of original objects" (S9), aligns with the early ideologies of Charleston's poetry and preservation societies. At its first meeting, the SPOD pledged to "'keep to the things that have stood the test of centuries'" (qtd. in Bellows 112), which the organization initially equated with grand homes commemorating an ostensibly nobler time. Likewise, in Heyward and Allen's essay, "Southern Poetry," published in the 1922 "Southern Number" of *Poetry* for which they were guest editors, they pronounced that while the poets of the PSSC welcome a moderate degree of formal innovation for reinvigorating public interest in local history, "the grand tradition of English poetry still lingers strongly in an old culture which has survived the wrack of civil war and of reconstruction" (48). Whether in reference to colonial British poetry or plantation houses, the shared preservationist outlook of the SPOD and PSSC's formative years centered on ideals of a genteel old-world order in the lowcountry.

Both Pinckney and Ravenel created within, or in close proximity to, cultural spaces in which preservationist interpretations of material culture were undergoing constant reexamination. Related to the "preservation of aesthetics" is the "aesthetics of preservation,"

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[16] These terms come from Mattern's presentation on how various contemporary visual, performance, and installation artists challenge conventional notions of preservation through the use of fragile or self-destructive materials. Mattern's scholarship also includes aesthetic examinations of storage/preservation facilities, such as archives, and the physical spaces of public institutions, such as libraries. A transcription of Mattern's presentation, titled "Preservation Aesthetics: My Talk for the LoC's Digital Preservation Conference," can be found on her website *Words in Space*.

which corresponds to the second phase of Charleston's preservation and literary movements. This second category investigates "the sensory contemplation *of preservation itself*…*art* that takes as its subject matter the practices, values, poetics, politics, ethics, and especially the limitations of preservation" (S10). As Mattern explains, aesthetic means of challenging traditional notions of preservation take on a variety of forms, including texts, art objects (visual and performative), and even archival and storage facilities. In reconstructing material and social histories from only dismantled features saved from demolished houses, Charleston's preservationists—and PSSC poets like Pinckney and Ravenel who had close personal and professional ties to them—negotiated the cultural memories they inherited and put forth alternate interpretations of an unreliable past. The material re-assemblages of Frost's adaptive method and the architectural fragments of Bragg's museum repository tangibly underscored the inherently shape-shifting narratives of historiography.

For Pinckney and Ravenel, both descendants of Charleston's oldest plantation families, the local histories and literary traditions championed by Heyward and Allen were central to the collective memory that they and other white cultural sponsors inherited. Like their contemporaries, they demonstrate conflicted attitudes toward the democratic, but homogenizing, effects of modern progress. However, their sense of group affinity was further complicated by their dual citizenship, in which they were privileged by race and class, yet also constrained by gender and region; as such, they questioned their literary and architectural inheritance more self-consciously than other poets of the PSSC, simultaneously celebrating and scrutinizing Charleston's preservationist urbanscape. Immediately following the PSSC's transition from male to female leadership in 1925, Pinckney and Ravenel's published volumes demonstrate a notable aesthetic and historicist shift within Charleston's central literary institution. Reading their poetry

within the context of the Charleston Renaissance suggests that the women poets of the PSSC signally internalized the self-questioning historiography that emerged from the city's burgeoning preservation movement. As such, their poetry works to supplement, investigate, and at times undermine the ideologies shaping the preservation movement. Adapting the broken syntax and semantics of dilapidated architecture, they transpose—and ultimately transform—dominant preservationist assumptions resting on hegemonic narratives of history, race relations, nation, and empire.

Pinckney's sonnet "Thread Flowers" contemplates the interpretive values and limitations of the period room, a trend among decorative arts museums during the first half of the twentieth century that inspired the "museum solution" at the center of Charleston's early preservation efforts (Aynsley 10, Weyeneth 3-4). The Pinckney family had a period room built in the Charleston Museum, which included a number of family heirlooms (Bellows 110). When the SPOD or Charleston Museum were able to purchase and preserve the original grounds, structures, and interiors of historic homes in situ, those properties became house museums curated for educating the public about life in colonial and antebellum Charleston. Pinckney's contemplation of the period room extends from her own firsthand involvement with these early preservation aims:

> A glassy drawing-room preserved and framed
> Her charm; and then I looked at her no more
> Because I saw her better out of flesh
> In a lace-shadow on the polished floor
> Where tempered sunlight traced the curtain-mesh
> On a low radiance, refined and thinned,
> Scrolled with an old design of flowers unnamed,--
> A mirroring of gray flowers awaiting wind.
> Dry flowers,—stirred by no light pollen-lust;
> Their powdery beauty lives in shafted haze
> Of barren and uninterrupted dust,
> And the long sifting of a dust of days.

> Divine adventurings, withheld by doom
> Skirt the immense quiescence of the room.

Not unlike the museum worker's historiographical arrangement of the period room for viewers, the antebellum woman curated her own self-presentation for visitors within the ceremonious frame of the drawing room. Although the glass-encased parlor has successfully "preserved and framed her charm," the orderly arrangement of objects cannot resuscitate the improvisational dimensions of a living body or personality. The period room mirrors the socially prescribed performance expected of the subject during her lifetime, yet "skirts" the "Divine adventurings" of unstaged real-world processes referred to by "doom." Analogous to the SPOD's attention to women's historical domestic activities, the focal image of the curtains' hand-sewn floral design situates the contribution of women's needlework within official representations of American artistic production. Simultaneously, however, the speaker's restless, unsatisfied gaze explores femininity as a continuum of both lived and idealized experience; the poem's consciously executed failure to distinguish between the two, and thus its failure to recover the antebellum woman as an embodied subject, puts the inaccessible past at the foreground of textual exhibit.

As a textual space in its own right, Pinckney's sonnet offers a reflexive variation on the period room that focally examines both retrievable and elusive elements of a past. Classically defined by fixed stanzaic forms, *stanza* translating to "room" in Italian, the sonnet is traditionally also a compact narrative housed within restrictive formalities of containment. Pinckney's lyrical gallery room greets its reader-viewers with a glass wall, in keeping with early American period rooms, which typically used glass to divide museum visitors from the static interiors they surveyed (Aynsley 10). This transparent boundary assured viewers that they were witnessing a historical moment fixed in time, as it also allowed them to visually stroll the room, thus creating the perception of transcendent access. A recurring image of destabilized perspectives throughout

Sea-Drinking Cities, the glass wall—in this case, doubly illustrated by the sonnet's squared typography—elicits hermeneutic limitations imposed by temporal distance and the selective outlook of public memory. As a textual space that is both still life and choreographed work of art, the poem's deflective attentions to the limits of the "uninterrupted" "quiescence of the room" work to conjure and superimpose the spirit of human vitality onto the museum's inorganic "flesh."

Ravenel's short eulogistic poem "Salvage," written after her first husband's death, similarly dwells on the relationship between material space and the irretrievable past that once dwelled within it. The poem's title and inventorial language allude to architectural surveys conducted by preservationists in search of features "'worthy of salvaging'" (6):

> Three things in my house are my own.
> Not the dark pictures whose blood runs in my veins,
> Nor the vines that I trained round the windows,
> Nor even the books.
> But the curve of a shabby armchair that molded
> itself on your body,
> And the echoes of songs that you sang,
> And the square of sun
> That comes as it came, first in the morning,
> When you had opened the window.

Ravenel's lyrical portrait of loss channels the larger preservationist impulse surrounding historic architecture, as the speaker compulsively lingers over the recessive contours of the armchair; as seen in Pinckney's "Thread Flowers," the sunlight's passage through the window signifies a life now absent. For Charleston's preservationist architects and activists, salvage was rooted in an "inherited sense of place" in which historic homes of interest were valued as material vestiges of Charleston's oldest patrician kinships (Yuhl 11). Although Ravenel's maternal bloodline came from such a family lineage, her poem of salvage negates patrimonial ancestry in favor of the self-procuring genealogy of lived experience. The decorative arrangements of family portraits, vines,

and books attest to culturally defined identity; the "shabby armchair" and its cumulative recesses, by contrast, present a dichotomy between self-definition and that which is inherited. Unbefitting a museum commemorating aristocratic nobility, the emotional weight of palpable absence, most keenly signified by the chair's humble recesses, is expressed in a textual space outside the museum.

In an undated handwritten poem titled "Palimpsest," Pinckney turns from the selective memory of period rooms to the indiscriminate amnesia of repurposed buildings. The poem's language of displacement recalls the adaptive method employed by the SPOD, in which preservationists affixed buildings with salvaged features from other structures. While the house's physical structure, its functional syntax, remains unchanged, its semantic structure, the external meanings ascribed to it, have accommodated its new occupant:

> In his office chair another man sits –
> In the walls remember?
> Hard plastic - senseless wood!
> Even his own house, drawn to his own plan –
> Faithlessly gives its shelter to others. (12-16)

Similar to the overwritten scroll of a palimpsest, the house's prior furnishings—physical remnants of the speaker's previous reality—have been rearranged or erased in order to provide a usable past for the house's new occupant. In Pinckney's "To a Traveller (Further Down the Stream of Time)," from her unpublished poetry volume, *Twelve Sang the Clock*, furniture similarly represents a discrepancy between interpretations of the material past: "Furniture is yet / Vociferous, crying: "It was here — was there! / Standing about, it will not let you forget" (48-50). As a participating architect of the house's original interior life, the speaker in "Palimpsest" is haunted by her own displaced memories; her remembrances of the office chair and its surrounding architectural space, though externally invisible, are semantically felt. Unlike the

"Hard plastic" of the house, she cannot erase or adapt her memories at will. Frustrated with the amnesia of the "senseless wood," the speaker redirects her preservationist impulse from the house to her own body:

> Even on my breast is no intaglio
> Where his head lay -
> Below earth's surface
> In the once-plastic coal
> The imprint of a fern
> Has lasted these thousand years. (17-22)

Unable to excavate a tangible preserve of memory, the speaker reluctantly accepts the human body's own palimpsestic amnesia; like the house, it is a mutable form of seemingly faithless attachments.

Nevertheless, the poem's final four lines offer some reassurance that traces of the past persist beneath human and architectural layers; yet similar to the archeological excavation of a thousand-year-old fern imprint, the speaker's displaced memories surface in an unpredictable, fragmentary process. The palimpsest, as John Hendrix asserts, offers a potent model of the dialogue between the human mind and architectural spaces, in which conscious and unconscious memories continually resurface and disappear in relation to physical environment (10). A building can neither fully contain nor suppress layers of the human past associated with it: Because people and the houses they live in (and leave) must necessarily adapt, psychological and material acts of *re*collection overwrite and reinterpret as much as they preserve past events. In Pinckney's 1952 novel *My Son and Foe*, in which she continues to draw from palimpsestic images of preservation and loss, the main character Kirk surveys, for the last time, the room in which he has lodged during his extended stay in the Caribbean: "It yawned empty, not his any more—except that the traveler always leaves faint scrawlings on the blank surfaces…What he had left behind, he supposed, was a kind of abstract picture of himself, a collage—" (248). In

similarly modernist fashion, Pinckney's poems about repurposed houses and period rooms self-consciously point toward resemblances between preservation and Cubist collages of inchoate likeness—the prototype never perfectly preserved, never quite made new.

The published poems in *Sea-Drinking Cities* typically evade the emotionally uncensored tone of "Palimpsest," relying on the modernist language of what Pinckney's biographer Barbara Bellows describes as "the emotional near miss" of ambiguous metaphors (134). The volume's architectural motif consists primarily of exterior features such as balconies, gates, windows, and walls that—like the salvaged building fragments used in adaptive methods of preservation—simultaneously eulogize and interrogate the collective memories they (re)assemble. The strongly visual bent of Pinckney's poetry—often characterized by reviewers as "'pen paintings'" (qtd. in Bellows 106)—developed largely under the guidance of Amy Lowell, who was also a pivotal influence on Ravenel's *The Arrow of Lightning*. In addition to cultural sponsors and preservationists like Susan Frost and Laura Bragg, Lowell helped expand both poets' stylistic repertoire, but also encouraged them to use their regional identity and knowledge to their advantage—a reflection of Lowell's savvy marketing skills and her genuine interest in promoting a distinctly American modernism.

Lowell's influence on Pinckney's descriptive assemblages of urban and natural spaces is clear. The New England poet demonstrated that Imagist poetry and regional subject matter were not mutually exclusive; in particular, her pictorial glimpses of regional ephemera offered for Pinckney a poetic technique for complicating traditional preservation ideologies. As inheritors of magnificent ancestral estates to which their public personas and private lives were inextricably bound, both women understood identity, aesthetics, and relationships through architecture. As descendants of wealthy Episcopalian families, they shared the privileged experiences of

education, travel, and leisure; but they also felt the responsibilities of noblesse oblige expected of their class and gender.[17] At the same time, both women adapted their residences, making them into interregional and international (white) literary salons. As Bellows notes, "The friendship that developed between Lowell and Pinckney echoed the national reconciliation at work during the twenties" (52). Like the MacDowell writers colony, which was a fundamental networking and creative site for Heyward and Allen, Lowell's Sevenels estate in Brookline, Massachusetts provided a crucial opportunity for the young Pinckney to develop her craft.[18]

Following a brief stay in Charleston to give a lecture for the Poetry Society in 1922, Lowell composed a series of poems inspired by her tours of the city's historic architecture, hosted by Pinckney. Three of those poems, "Charleston, South Carolina," "Madison Place," and "Vow," are included in her posthumously published volume, *What's O'Clock* (1925), which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1926. In response to several photographs Pinckney sent Lowell in September 1923 that were taken during Lowell's stay the previous year, Lowell recognizes a particular iron-scrolled gate that gave her the imagery for "Charleston, South Carolina": "Is this the garden of the house where Hervey lodged the Winter I was in Charleston, and is this grill gate the one which gave me the poem where I am looking through the gate; [sic] I hope it is"

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[17] Lowell and Pinckney also shared a passion for book collecting, which was highly popular between 1910-1930. Both women also loved the Romantic poets; Lowell was a scholar of John Keats and Pinckney's favorite poet was William Wordsworth (Bellows 50-51).

[18] Pinckney "deeply resented" (Bellows 45) not being included in Heyward and Allen's stays at MacDowell during the 1920s. She did, however, become a member during the 1930s, although the vitality of the community had largely dwindled by that time and was a limited resource.

In addition to Lowell's Sevenels estate, the artists and writers colony at Yelping Hill in West Cornwall, Connecticut also provided literary comeraderie and critique for Pinckney. At the encouragement of its organizer, Henry Seidel Canby (editor for the *Saturday Review of Books*), Pinckney visited the colony for a number of summers during the late 1920s (Bellows 94). The progressive gender politics of the colony were reflected in its innovative architecture; cabins lacked kitchens, and cooking and dining were done communally in a central barn, designed to encourage equal distribution of domestic duties among men and women and to foster an overall balance between individualism and collectivity. Designed by Ruth Maxon Adams, Yelping Hill has recently been described as a work of feminist architectural design by scholars (Allaback 42).

(Box 21/90, Folder 17, Josephine Pinckney papers). In this poem, she grapples with the city's preservation conundrum:

> Commerce, are you worth this?
> I should like to bring a case to trial:
> Prosperity versus Beauty,
> Cash registers teetering in a balance against the com-
> fort of the soul.
> Then, to-night, I stood looking through a grilled gate
> At an old, dark garden.
> Live-oak trees dripped branchfuls of leaves over the
> wall,
> Acacias waved dimly beyond the gate, and the smell
> of their blossoms
> Puffed intermittently through the wrought-iron scroll-
> work.
> Challenge and solution –
> O loveliness of old, decaying, haunted things! (7-17)

At the end of her letter in response to the Charleston photographs, Lowell implores Pinckney to "remember me to every stick and stone you see in your walks, by which I do not mean the people, but the veritable materials out of which Charleston is made." Lowell and Pinckney were both drawn to Imagism's capacity to crystalize ineffable states of being and emotion through word-pictures of "veritable materials." While Lowell at times pointedly criticized Charleston's hubris regarding its regional distinctiveness, she also deeply appreciated that its writers, artists, and architects "considered the city as a whole a work of art" (Bellows 43-44). The bucolic sensuality of Lowell's description of the garden teeming through the static containments of wall, gate, and iron echoes that of Pinckney's meditations on the cultivated lowcountry landscape.

Lowell's poem initially juxtaposes the surface structure, or "Beauty," of patrician historical memory against a competing narrative of modern economic "Prosperity" that would sweep aside such material culture in the pursuit of profit. By the poem's end, however, Lowell dissipates her earlier distinction between preservation and modernity, suggesting this is a false

duality. Lacking a clear referent, the phrase "Challenge and solution" encompasses both genteel tradition and industrial progress, thus reminding readers that Charleston inserted itself into modern commercial discourse by way of its preservation activities, which, to some degree, were a gimmick of the tourist industry. Moreover, Lowell's intermittent references throughout her Carolina series to "old," "dark," "decaying," and "haunted" spaces within the city's tourist landscape allude to the palimpsestic hauntings of human enslavement uneasily suppressed by the preservation movement's "solution" of architectural seduction.

Sea-Drinking Cities is divided into seven individually titled sections comprised of poems bearing the "moon, moss, and oak" motif that was nationally emblematic of the South's artistic tradition historically defined by white southern women. Yuhl remarks that the Charleston poets "collectively preserved an elitist status quo," keeping the image of "Charleston as a place of order and romance," although a few writers like Pinckney "revealed momentary cracks in the generally seamless white aristocratic surface" through occasional irony (92). Pinckney's use of an interplay between reticence and irony in her collection reflects the volume's underlying engagement with principles of chaos and conflict. The collection's surface themes of "order and romance" presents a textual tromp l'oeil, as suggested by the first three section titles, "Water-Front," "Lyre Gates," and "Chromatic Façade." "Front," "Gates," "Lyre," and "Façade" evoke Charleston's distinctive architecture, as they also suggest doubleness within the volume's narrative.

The obscuring and distorting qualities of Pinckney's architectural and natural images negate prolonged or direct gazes that would impose visual continuity. The volume's window imagery typifies its mirages of uniformity disrupted by myopic views of chaos and

impermanence.[19] The collection's opening poem, "Through a Window-Glass," presents a double sonnet juxtaposing the curious peering of an outsider against the unwelcoming stares of three native Charleston residents. Paired as perspectival "windows," the two sonnets illustrate what Keith Cartwright calls the "parallax effect," of "Western modernity's awakening to perspective" (221).[20] Charleston's modern demographic sea-change signaled a broader reconfiguration of regional and national boundaries in a country increasingly defined (and financed) through interregional and international migrations.

The first sonnet of "Through a Window-Glass," sub-titled "Looking In," depicts the almost-mythical quality surrounding Charleston's prolonged cultural isolation. The "glittering," yet uninviting, presence of the three knitting women further conveys outsiders' simultaneous friction and fascination with the inaccessible social circles of the city's Anglo-American elite:

> The passer-by who happens to lift his eyes
> To three long windows fronting the green
> sea,
> Is pricked by the oblique hawk-gaze of three
> Women with glittering needles that fall and rise.
> The shadowy room behind them magnifies
> Their forms; like Fates that sit eternally
> Beside a pool's dark margin, they decree
> An icy blight upon the one who pries. (1-8)
>
> The footsteps of the passer-by are hurried
> By these grim women and inimical;
> He calls them witches and resents the fear
> Of arrogant glances that had got him flurried.
> Walking along the water people all
> Speak evil of the trio sewing there (9-14)

[19] "Galaxy on a Window-Pane" is Pinckney's most deliberate Imagistic meditation on chaos at the cosmic level, in which she visually magnifies the randomized disruptions of rain patterns on a window. As her most conventional Imagistic poem (in that it lacks human and regional subject matter), it most clearly exemplifies the modernist tenet of chaos, as outlined in Daniel Singal's discussion of literary modernism (8).

[20] Pinckney once commented that a window in a room offered not just a view, but an "outlook" (Bellows 113).

Pinckney's comparison of the women to the "Fates that sit eternally," the mythological goddesses of human destiny, conveys the weight of their authority as social gatekeepers; and the uninterrupted "fall and rise" of their knitting needles signifies many aging aristocrats' determination to safeguard their collective identity following the Civil War. Leigh Anne Duck argues that the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was characterized by national ambivalence toward the "trope of the backward South" (6), or southern exceptionalism, a regional distinction based on real differences but also "projective fantasies" (3) of the South's stronger social connection and stability that could transcend the alienation increasingly associated with modernity's homogenizing effects.[21] The passer-by's fantasy of outsider access, signaled by his curious gaze into the windows, makes the women's unwelcoming response to "the one who pries" all the more acerbic.

The second sonnet, "Looking Out," shifts to the perspectival window of the three women, who echo the "strong sense of ancestral worship" (Yuhl 30) and "duty to stop the 'desecration of the city's historical landscape" (28) reignited among many local residents following the First World War:

> Between brocaded curtains they discern
> Distasteful faces weaving to and fro;
> Their carved chair-backs in a forbidding row
> Empanel a conclave absolute and stern.
> They read no Vulgate,[22] and their candles burn
> To other than Demos; when the long ships blow
> Steaming for ocean, they are not drawn; they know

[21] Duck frames her investigation of the modern relationship between southern region and the American nation-state through what she calls "southern apartheid," an Afrikaans word meaning "separateness" (6). She argues that Southern modernist writers, such as Erskine Caldwell, Richard Wright, and William Faulkner, engaged with tacit beliefs they observed (beliefs that had real-world effects on sectarian enforcement of federal law) in U.S. American culture that region, namely the American South, operated under a temporally encoded culture that was anachronistic to that of a liberalized, industrial nation.

[22] In colonial Charles Town, religious freedom had been granted "'to all Protestants'" (Mrs. St. Julian Ravenel 402). Until the turn of the nineteenth century, the city's substantial Catholic population, along with large numbers of other religious minorities, worshipped in private. Pinckney's reference to the Latin Vulgate points to the continued social exclusivity practiced by Charleston's Anglican patricians into the twentieth century.

> Steam shrills no siren-tone they want to learn.
> Tides of new people froth about the feet
> Of three inhospitable to the strange;
> Tall panes of glass wall out the common street,
> Wall in ancestral echoes bewailing change,
> They keep their glances poised to paralyze
> The passer-by who happens to lift his eyes. (23-28)

The strangers' "faces weaving to and fro" signify a contestation over the fabric of the collective identity spun by the city's aristocratic class. The sense of social identity for Charleston's "elite" was rooted in physical locale as much as genetic ancestry, especially after the loss of immense wealth during the Civil War. The "siren tone" of modernity's commercial offerings and accessible interregional transportation promise economic recovery, but at the price of social cohesion. In Pinckney's 1931 short story, "They Shall Return as Strangers," the prodigal southerner Henry returns to South Carolina from New York to reclaim his birthright to family land on the verge of being sold to a developer, who plans to turn it into a tourist resort. Contemplating his sudden interest in the family land that had been abandoned by its legal owners since the Civil War, Henry muses, "It's a sort of refuge between individual egotism and being obliterated in the mass" (555). While Pinckney sardonically portrays the three women's futile attempts to preserve their ancestral self-insulation, she also sympathizes with their fear of being "obliterated in the mass" as a result of modernization. The poem's two perspectives allow her to explore the complex consequences of modern progress.

Pinckney's modernist play with perspectives further extends to the sequence of individual poems in relation to one another. Her sequences of frequently oppositional perspectives suggests that despite the cultural dominance of a particular white historical memory, interpretations of historical locale are neither fixed nor universal. Two such poems, "The Old Women" and "The Misses Poar Drive to Church," feature a pair of elderly women adjusting to the South during

Reconstruction. Sequentially paired together within the volume's section titled "Tribute Rivers," they serve as honorary paeans to "living" relics of the past swept into a new present. Along with several other "tributes" to aging women, the poems denote Pinckney's simultaneous sympathy and frustration with obtuse resistance to change shown by members of Charleston's older generations. The sociopolitical changes depicted in "The Old Women" and "The Misses Poar" also resonate with the geographical feature of tributary rivers, symbolically mirroring the confluence of disparate regions within the dynamic body of nationhood.

In "The Old Women," one of Pinckney's most visible displays of racial pathos, two African-American elders discuss their newly bestowed "freedom" during the final years of their lives while sitting on cabin steps. Their physical and cognitive engagement with the present in decline, they are blind to the "frail peach-trees" (4) in the garden and unable to "smell the plum" (6). Even the playful cries of their grandchildren, wearing "faded garments" (5), go unnoticed. Instead, the women's "dull eyes hold recaptured births and deaths / That stand about them as a wake for their / Own funerals,—" (10-12). They have lived nearly a century within the plantation's slavery system, yet as the only remaining survivors of their generation, all they have to commemorate their lives are their own intangible memories:

> The old women puff and mutter about the ways
> Of life since freedom came. One says a master
> Would give her burial.
>
> The other, looking sixty years away
> To dancing crowds of dizzy negroes, mumbles,
> 'Free es a frog . . . (19-24)

The underwhelming promise of burial by a "master," along with one woman's pointedly ironic simile "free 'es a frog," underscores the enduring racial dynamics of the plantation system following the Civil War. As living relics of *both* the pre- and postbellum South, the women's

impoverished living conditions (and that of their grandchildren) indicate that their "ways of life" have not significantly changed since the end of the Civil War. As Kathleen M. Gough observes, "Almost as quickly as African Americans were pronounced free, the country was 'exhausted' by the difficulty in enforcing the laws that would ensure real freedom" (178). Pinckney's temporal ambiguity in the phrase "looking sixty years away" acknowledges that the quality of life for most African Americans living in South Carolina had not significantly changed between 1805 and 1925, between the start of the war and the modern realities of Jim Crow. The "frail peach-trees" of the women's vegetable garden attest to their poverty, as unremitting as the perennial "snowdrop leaves before the door" (7). Evoking Lowell's racially inflected image of a Charleston garden, Pinckney, decades later, asserted, "'The order of the garden made in the wilderness is the symbol of order in government'" (qtd. in Bellows 205). In this way, the old women's sparse garden reflects the false ideal of benevolent pre- and post-bellum paternalism, a myth tied to Charleston's tourist industry, as it also registers the federal government's delay in bringing civil rights and fair opportunities for African Americans to fruition.

"The Misses Poar Drive to Church" centers on two elderly white women of approximately the same generation. Despite their slightly tattered apparel (their name an ironic play on their genteel poverty), they ride in a carriage drawn by a black coachman, looking as "fine" as they did "before the War / When money was free in the house of Poar" (7-8). When the young pastor calls the congregation to pray for President Grant, the Misses Poar, finding such a request unsanctimonious, instead turn their attention to "dear Great-grand-papa's prayer-book, / Wherein are found urbane petitions / To guard the Crown against seditions" (28-30):

> Not that they hold King Charles so dear,
> Although their blood is Cavalier,
> But it suits their piety, on the whole,
> Better to pray for the Restoration

Than the overseer of a patch-work nation (35-36).

Unwilling to accept the disintegration of the old southern aristocracy, the women turn to the "Cavalier myth," a "heroic figure of the southern gentleman" (Singal 17) that "embodied traits of order, stability, and cohesion that southern society stood in desperate need of" (9), according to the white aristocratic classes. The women's characterization of Grant as "the overseer of a patch-work nation," of course, also ironically applies to King Charles, whose reign exemplifies a transatlantic "patch-work" of European colonialism. Despite the logical fallacy of equating the British Restoration with national unity, the Cavalier myth was nevertheless a powerful agent of social identity throughout much of the white South—one which still held some meaning even for Pinckney, who descended from a line of military officers and prominent government officials that began with the founding of the colony. In this way, the juxtaposed perspectives throughout *Sea-Drinking Cities*, as exemplified in "The Old Women" and "The Misses Poar," reflect Pinckney's contention that "America had aristocratic as well as democratic origins" (Bellows 164).

Pinckney's "sympathetic cynicism" surrounding the Misses Poar's prayer book suggests she is similarly commenting on Charleston's modern tourism propaganda, which used the Cavalier myth that white southern elites had looked to for centuries in search of social cohesion. As Ethan Kytle and Blain Roberts observe, "Promotional literature elided Charleston's role in inciting the Civil War, preferring, instead, to emphasize the city's bravery and sacrifice during the less controversial Revolutionary War" (140). Predating the official onset of the Charleston Renaissance and its historic preservation movement, heritage groups at the turn of the century were already attempting to revive the Cavalier myth connected to Charleston's colonial pastime. Local chapters of the National Society of Colonial Dames and the Daughters of the American

Revolution purchased a number of disrepaired colonial buildings to turn into educational house museums about "the beginnings of American nationalism" (Weyeneth 2). With the controversy of the Civil War still very much a part of the recent past, white elites looked to the Revolutionary War to revive a mythical past of regional harmony that was in accord with wider "American" values.

No poet of the PSSC challenged Charleston's heroic Cavalier identity more emphatically than Ravenel. Not only was she the most formally experimental of the Charleston School poets, her engagement with local history radically diverged from the PSSC's most commercially successful poetry. Although Ravenel grew up in a respected family of affluence and relative prestige, they were not altogether embraced by lowcountry blue bloods due to her father's lesser social status as a self-made immigrant (Rubin 6). In many of her longer poems, she revises romanticized accounts of local history, particularly those by William Gilmore Simms, by textually revisiting previous eras from the perspectives of marginalized figures. A prolific novelist and scholar of the Carolina lowcountry, Simms' writings strongly informed the historical memory of white southerners from the antebellum period onward. His celebrations of southern social institutions, class stratifications, and enlightened upper-class rule were a major component of the modern Renaissance poets' literary inheritance, to which the Poetry Society's official spokesmen emphatically laid claim. As guest editors of the nationally lauded 1922 "Southern number" of *Poetry* magazine, Heyward and Allen assert that Charleston, "where the tides of immigration have brought no alien tongues," is unequivocally a "European culture, planted by a strong stock in colonial times" (48). In the interest of preserving the city's Anglo-American colonial aesthetics, Heyward and Allen pronounced that "it is from this tradition and from the descendants of that stock that the southern poetical renascence must come" (48). In

many ways, the PSSC was a functionary of the tourist and preservation industry, helping to convince outsiders that Charleston's Cavalier identity was a significant component of national history.

Ravenel's poetry, however, offers a different perspective on Cavalier legends of heroism and historical accounts of national cohesion surrounding them. Her poem "The Pirates," about the 1718 capture, trial, and executions of legendary buccaneers "Black Beard" and Stede Bonnet in colonial Charles Town, exemplifies her challenge to romanticized portrayals of the colonial past. Three years earlier, Heyward and Allen published a poem in *Carolina Chansons*, also titled "The Pirates," about the same incident. The latter is narrated from the perspective of one of the English colonists who enlisted in the nautical criminal hunt to "buy our honor back" (line 122) from the "debonnaire" (70) pirates, who initially charmed the townspeople with tales of "mad romances" (71-72). In contrast to Heyward and Allen's romanticized portrayal of the event, Ravenel's poem is written largely from a skeptical, investigative point of view, illustrating what Susan Donaldson argues is Ravenel's "genealogical approach to the past," which prioritizes the "lowest levels of society and culture one can examine" (177). Ravenel's mother-in-law, Mrs. St. Julien Ravenel, wrote a popular book on Charleston's local history, entitled *Charleston: the Place and the People* (1917), which includes a chapter on Stede Bonnet and Blackbeard. Written when interest in Charleston's local history and architecture was rapidly building momentum, the book concentrates primarily on events from the colonial era, echoing the patriotic tone of Charleston's promotional literature. From a biographical perspective, Ravenel may have perceived that there were similarities between privateers during the South Atlantic's "age of piracy" and the paternal side of her family, also of the merchant class.

Renouncing the moderate attitude toward experimental verse forms prescribed by the Poetry Society's early leaders, Ravenel's long, discursive poems about colonial pariahs explicitly unsettle formal and thematic boundaries. The speaker alternates among first-person accounts of the trial from the perspectives of modern speculator, colonist bystander, and, at times, the pirates themselves. Ravenel erratically switches from one speaker to another, interspersing ellipses, dashes, and parentheses throughout her polyvocal free verse to signal abrupt interruptions or interjections in each speaker's account. Her conflations of form and content mirror the liminal subjectivity of the poet's changing persona and the spectral figures *for* whom and *through* whom the persona erratically speaks. Donaldson argues, "If Ravenel questions the 'voice' and history bestowed upon her" by figures from the past and from her own community, "she nonetheless resists substituting her own version of truth and authority" (185) by using a "de-centering strategy that 'constantly takes itself apart as it takes others into itself'" (185). In their poetic collection, Heyward and Allen include a seven-paragraph footnote demonstrating the "painstaking research and careful verification" that the volume's preface assures its readers will distinguish the poems "amid the babel of unauthentic utterance" (12). By contrast, Ravenel's 225-lines of self-dividing, elliptical free verse mirror the syncopated "wreckage" of the trial's primary remaining document, a lengthy transcription of Judge Robert Johnson's remonstrative closing remarks. Ravenel points out that primary documents from the trial transcribe only the interpretation of events by the "well-found" (160) and civically powerful:

> No record remains
> In the ancient records of Charles Town,
> No scribble, no note—
> Only the outraged, discretionless speech of his judgeship (166-169)

The conglomerate voice of Ravenel's poem, an obstruction to decided interpretation, undermines conventional preservationist assumptions about factual verification, recalling Naimou's

contention that the "value of the archive becomes its ability to signify the impossibility of recovery" (2).[23] In lieu of a historical footnote, the poem's last line emphatically proclaims the pirates—and, by extension, those who attempt to salvage them—are "Interpreters of the Sea!"

While the poem's polyvocal narration works to undermine a monopoly on historical interpretation, it also elicits the "multicultural, multiracial, and multinational social order" Rediker 17) that characterized many early-eighteenth-century pirate ships. Hailing from across the globe, pirate communities were "Villains of all Nations," "attacking the commerce of the world without respect for nation or property" (17) and disrupting an increasingly regulated and rapidly expanding Atlantic economy (9). The "collectivist ethos" (101) shared among shipmates and pirate crews, who represented different nationalities and ethnicities, corresponded with a democratic and egalitarian social order that "transcended nationality" (94).

Ravenel expands the connotations of "piracy" to encompass multiple factions of Charles Town's marginalized populations. Addressing the pirates, the speaker describes Charles Town's marginal strata who "once loved you, / The humble, whose very life is in some sort a piracy / Marauding the sun and air from the well-found and solid / citizen" (53). Ravenel depicts the pirates not just as individual persons whose crimes cannot be rightfully confirmed or qualified, but as members of Charles Town's marginal factions, including its impoverished vendors and "lattice-bred women," "who live here behind / Windows and iron-tusked walls" (70-71). Other sections of the poem describing the pirates' sentencing and execution on the gallows evoke the murders of enslaved persons, creating palimpsestic associations of historical violence. Bonnet's

[23] In Angela Naimou's investigation of how contemporary U.S. and Caribbean literatures imaginatively reckon with the "debris" of legal personhood from the circum-Atlantic slave trade, she identifies a "salvage aesthetics" that "calls into questions and refashions the objects and subjects of history, creating literary and visual assemblages of historical fragments figuratively pulled from the wreck of the present" (10).

unnamed accomplices are compared to "trammeled sea creatures" (34) and, curiously, receive far less pity than their legendary leaders:

> Seventeen-hundred-eighteen—
> They were trying the pirates;
> Men of Stede Bonnet's, shipmates of Vaughn and of
> Blackbeard;
> Noisesome things of the sea, vicious with spines, smeared
> With abhorrent blood.
> They had scooped them a netful and flung it into a corner.
> This vile frutto di mare. (21-27)

As Naimou observes of much circum-Caribbean literature, the "bottom of the sea" connotes "all those drowned in the course of the Atlantic slave trade" (209). The intersecting migrations of privateers and fugitives are a significant component of what Naimou calls the "politics of recognition" at the center of legal cases involving insurrections on slave ships, the outcome of which depended on "whether the Africans who revolted were rightly identified as pirates, mutineers, fugitive property (slaves), or human beings illegally kidnapped and trafficked" (57). The description of Bonnet, Vaughn, and Blackbeard's "shipmates" as blood-smeared, foul-smelling sea creatures suggests that they dually signify the corpses of enslaved persons and the slave traders who carelessly tossed them overboard, the murderous underside of colonial nation-building.

Ravenel further calls into question the patriotic sentiments at the heart of the pirate legend—a subject of great interest for tourists—by illustrating South Carolina's sociohistorical connections to the Caribbean. In 1718, the same year of Bonnet and Blackbeard's execution, the Bahamas became a British colony, marking the end of the "age of piracy," during which time there had been moderate governmental protection of pirates throughout the Caribbean and its seaport colonies on the continent (Benitez-Rojo 61). The speaker puts the judge, Governor

Robert Johnson, on posthumous trial, with particular attention to how his views on privateering altered in correlation to changing national boundaries:

> Governor once of Providence in the Bahamas,
> Not unreputed as over-friendly to rovers,
> Not unrebuked for their fellowship.
> For the sake of old days, will he . . .
> Wait!
> His voice! Those are the melting, significant accents
> That won on their lordships in London……..

The judge's previous governorship in the Bahamas, to which South Carolina had been previously subsumed as a colony (the colony of a colony), foregrounds the constant reconfiguration of colonial boundaries that defined the history of the circum-Caribbean.[24] The 1700s were a transitional period for European colonies in the South Atlantic, moving from an economy based on privateering to one based on the plantation system (61). The judge's inconclusive "melting" accents metonymically signify the creolization of cultures that resulted from these migrations.[25]

During the winter and spring of 1901-1902, Charleston hosted the South's first world's fair, known as the South Carolina Inter-state and West Indian Exhibition. The architectural theme was a "seemingly odd combination" of American Colonial and Spanish, a blend "meant to reflect the region's early colonial heritage as well as its links to the nearby Spanish Caribbean" (Chibbaro 7), as illustrated in selected exhibits from Guatamala, Cuba, and Puerto Rico (8). In this way, Charleston curated physical remnants of its circum-Caribbean identity according to the cultural and economic zeitgeist of the time. Orchestrated around the same time that local chapters of the Colonial Dames and Daughters of the Revolution had begun their heritage

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[24] Beginning in 1670, the year the colony of Charles Town was founded, the Bahamas were governed as a proprietary extension of Carolina (Montgomery 13). Like other islands and coastal regions in the South Atlantic, unregulated maritime trafficking was crucial to the economies in South Carolina and the Bahamas.

[25] In her 1923 collection of Gullah folklore, American anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons suggests that the linguistic similarities she observed between Gullah and the creole languages spoken in the Bahamas can be attributed to the migration of thousands of Loyalists and enslaved Africans to the Bahamas during the Revolutionary War (xvii).

conservation efforts, the primary goal of the exhibition was to stimulate Charleston's trade economy with the Caribbean, its secondary aim to encourage tourism. In illustrating Charleston's endlessly fluctuating acknowledgment of its Caribbean identity, Ravenel emphasizes what Chris Bongie calls the "double identity" intrinsic to the topos of the Caribbean island, an identity that is paradoxically both "insular" and "relational" (18).[26]

> Shall the Carolinas be ruined as one hears that Jamaica
> is ruined?
> Are not our rice-ships seized at our very gates?
> Is not the incredible true? In our own walled town what
> disturbance, what rioting,
> What threatenings to burn it—burn Charles Town—burn
> it about our ears! (48-54)

In contrast to the Exposition's promotion of its economic ties to the Spanish colonies, Ravenel's poem emphasizes South Carolina's genealogical connections to its British sister colonies. Because the Spanish colonies were understood as feared competitors, rather than proprietary extensions, of colonial Charles Town, their prominence in modern Charleston's historical memory of its relation to the Caribbean only helped solidify the city's mythical image as a gallant forger of American national boundaries. Ravenel responds to the selective amnesia of Charleston's civic autobiography by drawing attention to the British colonialism that geoculturally tied South Carolina's "walled town" to its Caribbean doppelganger, thus complicating the idea of Charleston as a repository of American nationalist history. The transition from a maritime privateering economy to an inland plantation economy meant that greater importance was placed on solidifying national boundaries. The poem suggests that pirate-induced arson in Jamaica not only threatened the economy of its sister colonies, but also reflected the "relational" dynamics of nation-building. Ironically befitting the erasure of this

[26] In the seventeenth century, there was a major slave trade route between Jamaica, Barbados, and Charles Town. Charles Town became a site for overflow of planters from Jamaica and Barbados (Cassidy 17).

problematic circum-Caribbean history, Bonnet, Blackbeard, and countless numbers of slaves, Native Americans, and other pirates were brutally hanged and buried at a waterfront now known as Battery Park, or Whitepoint Gardens, a defensive seawall which became a popular pleasure ground in the second half of the nineteenth century (J. Ravenel 78). It was also a popular tourist spot in the early twentieth century, where visitors came to admire the military statues and cannons commemorating the city's role in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 and to take in the view of southern mansions along the waterfront. Made even more picturesque by live oaks, palmettos, and a gazebo, Charleston's beloved public garden conveyed a colonial narrative of genteel American world-order to tourists unaware of the brutal execution ground buried under the bleached oyster shells lining the scenic promenade.

Even more than its writers, Charleston's visual artists played a crucial role in igniting interest in historic preservation and bolstering the city's tourist economy. Local and visiting white artists rarely depicted the waterfront in their work, focusing instead on the city's old Anglican churches and creating romanticized images of African American street vendors (Severens 47). Earlier paintings tended to focus on Charleston's harbor, emphasizing the area as a "commercial center with connections across the sea" (47), but by the early twentieth century, most white artists turned to wistful scenes of the city's colonial architecture and Gullah-Geechee population, as the visual distribution of these commodified subjects were central to the city's "sanitized history-based tourism" (155). Even the short-lived homages to Charleston's historical maritime trade at the turn-of-the-century West Indies and Inter-State Exposition were exhibited within inland architectural spaces designed specifically for the event. While visual artists deemphasized the archipelagic geography of the city, Ravenel and Pinckney frequently situate their poetic narratives along the liminal space of the waterfront and its transnational horizons.

These settings on the ocean, a literal and symbolic gravesite of lost histories, foreground the undocumented past within preservation narratives centered on the urbanscape. Promotional visual artists and historians had another reason for deemphasizing the Atlantic: Charleston's naval yard stood along the oceanfront. Contracted at the turn of the century, the navy yard became a highly lucrative industry that created numerous jobs during the First and Second World Wars. Charleston's tourist industry reinforced the city's lucrative images of refinement and harmony, helping to detract attention from the conspicuous displays of its wartime business.[27]

The title poem of *Sea-Drinking Cities* conceives of the Atlantic as a gravesite of undocumented and suppressed histories. Like the mythical "drowned" city of Atlantis, the poem suggests, the shipwrecks of the lost past continuously haunt the successive civilizations that overwrite them.

> Sea-drinking cities have a moon-struck air;
> Houses are topped with look-outs; as a dog
> Looks up with dumb eyes asking, dormers stare
> At stranger-vessels and swart cunning faces.
> They are touched with long sleeping in the sea-born
> Moon;
> They have heard fabled sails slatting in the dark,
> Clearing with no papers, unwritten in any log,
> Light as thin leaves before the rough typhoon;
> Keels trace a phosphor mark,
> To follow to old ocean-drowned green places. (1-10)

[27] Martha Severens' book, *The Charleston Renaissance*, provides an excellent history of the period's visual art. It should be noted that although "the dominant taste in Charleston was conventional realism" (Severens 156), there were a number of exceptional visual artists whose work was heavily influenced by European modern art; those artists employing modernist styles, however, generally did not support themselves through their work (156). While there was considerable resistance to non-objective art during the Charleston Renaissance, interestingly, South Carolina has a remarkable history of abstract art spanning the mid-twentieth century (with some abstract painters predating the mid-twentieth century as early as the 1930s) to the present (see South Carolina State Museum's exhibition catalogue, *Abstract Art in South Carolina*, 1949-2012).
Although not a modernist, painter, Edwin Harleston created intimate portraits of African Americans and working-class whites that deviated from the nostalgic stock images produced by Charleston's elite white artists during the early twentieth century. An African American artist, Harleston was excluded from Charleston's white artist communities (although at one time Laura Bragg unsuccessfully tried to arrange an exhibition of his work at the Charleston Museum). However, his work was well-known and widely respected among artists of the Harlem Renaissance (see Donaldson's "Charleston's Racial Politics" and Severens).

Whether the result of neglect, typhoons, or wars that cyclically plague the Carolina seacoast, the elusive past, as fragile as the "thin leaves" of parchment paper, is more often than not reduced to specters of myth and legend. Pinckney's wordplay on "fabled" and "Clearing" (i.e. fiction versus clarity) insinuates that myth and history cannot always be distinguished when attempting to recover the past. Moving retroactively, the "phosphor mark" registers multiple temporalities spanning the recent and distant past, alluding to warfare materials used during the Civil and First World Wars and to Charleston's failed phosphor industry at the end of the nineteenth century. Similar to phosphor's chemically delayed emittance of light, the sea signifies a disjointed dialogue among the ghosts of present and past.

Because this dialogue, or oceanic haunting, can never be resolved through factual verification, coastal cities like Charleston "never lose longing for the never-known" (11). Pinckney, who likened historical research to conducting detective work (Bellows 157), continually revisits themes of retroactive longing:[28]

> Their loveliness, as of an old tale told . . .
> A harbor-goblet with wide-brimming lip
> Where morning tumbles in shaken red and gold,
> Trincketed and sun-bedizened they sip;
> Their strong black people bargain on the docks
> In gaudy clothes that catch the beating light . . .
> But all betwitched, old cities sit at gaze
> Toward the wharves of Magador . . . Gibraltar,
> Where the shawl-selling Arab piles a blaze
> Of fiery birds and flowers on Trade's heaped altar.
> Sea-drunken sure are these, —
> Towns that doze—dream—and never wake at all
> While the soft supple wind slides through the trees,
> And the sun sleeps against the yellow wall. (21-37)

[28] Pinckney's historical novel *Hilton Head* (1941) is based on her ancestor Henry Woodward, a seventeenth-century privateer whose life she exhaustively researched. She likened her own compulsive obsession with historical research to "'the exuberant melodrama that fills the pigeonhole, the tin box, the hair trunk that have preserved for us the color of early America'" (157).

Magador and Gibraltar were major economic seaports throughout the eighteenth century, and were notable players in Atlantic slave trade routes between Africa, Europe, and North America. As emphasized by the poem's syncretic image of the "harbor-goblet," the geocultural exchanges between the south European and north African peninsulas mirror those of port cities in the southeastern United States and the Caribbean, whose intimate geographical and historical proximities—those "ocean-drowned green places"—have been negated by the surface syntax of national boundaries.

Pinckney's nightscapes on the oceanfront concentrate on water's reflective and opaque qualities in the dark, suggesting that Charleston's waterfront and its overlaps with the South Atlantic are palimpsestic spaces in which the past and present merge in normative violence. In "The Harbor," temporal layers of warfare haunt the spellbound, opaque waters:

> Boat-lights are clustered on the smooth black-
> ness
> Like water-lilies,
> With long, gold stems of reflections;
> Stillness hangs
> Like a spell
> Over dark water long enchanted,
> Except where the ships of war stand off the fort
> Invisible
> And sound faint broken warnings.
> The Captain's barge leaves for town,
> And the rat-tat-tat of the motor floats over
> As though a gnome drummer rolled his mimic drum.
> Then four bells, sweet and slow and far,
> And two bugle notes blown long and low. (1-14)

The unseen "ships of war" evoke South Carolina's violent maritime activity spanning colonial conquests to its active navy yards during the First World War. The "faint broken warnings" of naval radio dissipate into an aural fugue of time signatures; the sounds of radio, motor boat, mimic drum, bells, and bugle notes register a transhistorical space filled with real-time and

apparitional signifiers of violence, a cyclical stasis that is both contemporary and anachronistic. Displayed around the modern waterfront at Battery Park were cannons from the Civil War—with modern-day missile ships and destroyers in the background.[29] Other American modernists such as Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop (who could also be characterized as coastal poets) also observed tourist and military economies concurrently develop in southeastern port cities like Key West.[30] Themes of historical maritime violence in Pinckney's, as well as Ravenel's, poetry, are also reminiscent of contemporary pastoral poet Wendell Berry's preoccupations with the deep histories of colonial and racial violence embedded in Kentucky's rural landscape, which Berry describes in his 1968 essay, "A Native Hill," as "a kind of palimpsest scrawled over with the comings and goings of people, the erasure of time already in process even as the marks of passage are put down" (15).

Similar to other contact zones like Key West, South Carolina's infrastructural and residential developments eventually called for more centrally controlled urban planning and preservation practices. Beginning in the late 1920s, preservation became increasingly corporatized and government-regulated as Charleston's private and public sectors began to merge and preservationists shifted their focus from saving individual buildings to "an area approach" aimed at protecting entire neighborhoods. Following the Stock Market Crash of 1929, securing Charleston's tourist industry took greater precedence for city government. After a decade of attempts on the part of the SPOD for legal protection of historic buildings, an unprecedented zoning ordinance was put into law in 1931 and run by the Board of Architectural Reviewers (BAR), the country's first government-supported urban planning firm. The zoning

[29] Visiting artist Harrison Cody wryly captured this irony in a watercolor made during World War II, titled *The Battery, Charleston* (Severens 174).
[30] Stevens' "Ideas of Order at Key West" and Bishop's "Full Moon, Key West" allude to palimpsistic violence in the circum-Caribbean in strikingly similar ways to Pinckney's "The Harbor."

ordinance dealt not only with immediate threats to historic districts, but also long-term urban planning that placed even greater emphasis on maintaining a consistent historic narrative for tourists (Weyeneth 12-18). Only buildings and features dating before the Civil War were considered of historical interest, and all renovations of historic properties had to first be approved by the BAR, which "defined the temporal parameters" (Yuhl 44) of official historic districts such that visitors would "have understood that Charleston's *real* history ended in 1860" (45). The BAR's definitions of good taste and historic worth were based on, as stated by its head organizer Albert Simons, "'a law controlling esthetics'" (44) which aimed to negate "'the Nineteenth century, that Tower of Babel, where the language of tradition was lost and architecture was confounded'" (44).

In 1930s Charleston and elsewhere on the continent, the New Deal funded newly segregated housing projects and zoning ordinances that displaced poor whites and African Americans and drove their small businesses out of gentrifying tourist districts. Charleston's preservation scheme during the interwar years called for the forced removal of African Americans from historically integrated neighborhoods to federally funded racially segregated housing projects outside the visual parameters of the "'Old and Historic District'" (47). As part of this "urban 'reclamation' along racial lines" that became "part of the preservation strategy" (46), African Americans living in Cabbage Row, the setting of Heyward's *Porgy*, were evicted, and the building was remodeled to preserve "'the picturesque life of 'Catfish Row'" that drew tourists to the city (169). The African-American tenants living at 36 Chalmers—built by a freewoman of color named Jane Wightman in 1835—were also displaced when Pinckney purchased and remodeled the house in 1929. In Pinckney's unpublished poem, "To a Traveller (Further Down the Stream of Time)," written as a diatribe from a ghost who haunts a ruined old

house, the apparitional spirit implores the "naive" (50) visitor: "—Am I not consanguineous? Am I not of our blood? / Tilly vally, Lady! —" (57-58). "Tilly vally," an antiquated colloquialism indicating dismissal of something that is trite, recalls cyclical patterns of racial and gendered erasures. In Keith Cartwright's discussion of modern white writers' preoccupation with (self-projected constructs of) African-American life, he contends, "Whiteness as a (non) marker of ethnicity, positioned whites as people who could not possibly know what to do with their blood (save keep it consanguine, i.e., 'in the family') since to spill or mix blood was to enter into the denaturing stain of color and impurity" (223). Perhaps reflective on some level of Pinckney's awareness of the contradictions of this architectural consanguinity, the poem concludes: "Remember me, your fellow, / Who would enforce you in the fervent host / Of householders, and from that bondage speaks" (64-66).

While to a certain degree Pinckney challenged idealized visions of the past, she paradoxically also functioned as a major cog in Charleston's white elite "preservation machine" (135). In addition to pre-bellum architecture, one of the most lucrative components of Charleston's "public trade in historical memory" (157) was the Society for the Preservation of Negro Spirituals, whose members, all descendants of slave-owners, "positioned themselves as authentic representatives of the plantation past" (Yuhl 134). Pinckney was a member for more than thirty years of the Society for the Preservation of Negro Spirituals, founded in 1922. Unlike the widely popular vaudeville minstrel shows, most of which were performed for working-class whites, the SPS performed for other elite whites. Before the publication of the PSSC's dialect poetry in the early 1920s, the language of the Gullah was virtually unknown outside the South Carolina and Georgia lowcountry. By the late 1920s, scholars of linguistics began visiting the lowcountry to study Sea Island speech, most notably Lorenzo Dow Turner, the first academically

trained linguist to conduct systemized field research on the Gullah between 1929 and 1949 (Montgomery 158-160).[31] The SPS tried to distinguish themselves from minstrel entertainment by emphasizing their painstaking efforts to produce "authentic" transcriptions of Gullah-Geechee dialect and African-American spirituals, samplings of which they included in *The Carolina Low-Country*, a compendium of essays, poetry, and artwork inspired by "the task of salvaging the spirituals of the Negroes" (185).[32]

Pinckney co-organized the SPS's Committee on Research and Preservation, "which was charged with creating the authoritative text of each spiritual for permanent preservation" (Bellows 69). The group originally wished to preserve South Carolina's Gullah spirituals only in the oral tradition by performing them for live audiences; as the group's popularity and national renown increased, they eventually changed their stance on their "preservation" methods and began transcribing the spirituals in written form and in audio recordings. By the mid-twenties, the SPS had, for elite white audiences, become the "de facto experts" on black spirituals (Yuhl 155). Pinckney was also a member of the SPS's Committee on Expeditions, a group that visited black churches in outlying rural areas (Bellows 70). The appeal of these outlying churches was that most of their members were illiterate and relied strictly on the oral tradition of spirituals. In this way, the oral, textual, and recorded commodification of Gullah-Geechee oral tradition mirrors the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings' usurpation of black tenement houses for the interpretation and nostalgic enjoyment of slave-owning descendants and their upperclass

[31] Turner, a native of North Carolina, had become interested in Sea Island language in 1929 when he was teaching at South Carolina State College that summer. Between 1917 to 1928, he had been a professor of English at Howard University; from 1929 to 1946, he served as Head of the English Department at Fisk University, where he designed the African Studies program. Turner published his two decades of field research on the Gullah in *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* in 1949. There had been some white studies of the Gullah prior to Turner, such as those published by Ambrose Gonzales, Reed Smith, John Bennett, and Guy Johnson, although none of them were formally educated in linguistics or African Studies. Turner was the first African American and the first academically trained linguist to publish scholarship on Gullah, or "Sea Island Creole" (Montgomery 158-174).

[32] Included in the compendium are an essay by Heyward, "The Negro in the Low-country," a poem by Pinckney, "Island Boy," and a poem by Ravenel, "The Yemassee Lands."

white affiliates—a colonizing/segregationist move further evinced by the fact that the spirituals performed and circulated by the SPS were never edited or reviewed by African Americans.

Pinckney exhibits her scrupulousness for recording Gullah dialect in *Sea-Drinking Cities'* longest Gullah poem "Hag!". In one of the collection's rare instances of first-person narrative, Pinckney uses a documentary style to convey the "anthropological" ethos of her transcription and to establish her familiarity with the poem's speaker, Victoria Rutledge, a Gullah domestic worker in the Pinckney household who had been Pinckney's primary caregiver since infancy: "Once when I went to see Victoria / As she sat picking shrimp on the kitchen porch—" (1-2). The rest of the poem presents a transcription of a folktale that had been orally passed down for generations in Rutledge's family and includes detailed descriptions of Rutledge's expressions and body language, emphasizing Pinckney's implicit claim that the poem derives from firsthand observation and transcription.[33]

According to the poem, Rutledge was told the story by her grandmother, who "seen one [a "hag"] w'en she was a chile / In lamp-oil times" (14-15). The story is about an enslaved woman who possesses supernatural powers, namely the ability to slip in and out of her flesh at will and roam about freely in ghost-like form. One night, the white townspeople hide her skin, capture her when she returns home, and take her to the gallows to be hanged, where "Mo' 'n a million people" come to watch (27). At the moment of execution, the woman summons her skin, and when it arrives she escapes:

> …….De hag ain't crack 'er breath,
> But she look rale mad w'en dey stan' er on de gallus;

[33] Victoria Rutledge's impact on Pinckney's work is notably similar to the profound influence of Caroline Barr on William Faulkner's writings. Like Rutledge, Carr worked most of her life as a black nursemaid for a privileged Southern white family, and the stories she told deeply affected the life and writings of the successful white author whom she had reared from infancy. In her study of the roles women played in the development of Faulkner's art, Judith L. Sensibar provides a sustained discussion of Barr's influence on the Mississippi writer in *Faulkner and Love: the Women Who Shaped His Art* (2009).

En w'en dey start to put 'er in de noose
Suddent she squall out—
'Skin! Skin!
Slip agin!'
Please Gawd! De skin come sailin' troo de air
En' slip right on 'er—vlip! En' den she *laugh*
To kill, an' ride off on de win' en' gone!
Great Day! You ought'a seen dem people run,
My Gra'ma say. Yes, Ma'am, she *seen* dat hag. (28-38)

Like the centuries-old spirituals Pinckney researched and "preserved," the "hag" story changed from the medium of oral storytelling to printed text, a transition that rested on an implicit assumption of ownership.

Comparable to the palimpsestic history surrounding the pirate legend of Stede Bonnet—whose firsthand translation of events must also be inferred from beyond the gallows—the poem "Hag!" raises, to borrow Naimou's term, its own "politics of recognition." In this way, the Gullah-Geechee poems of South Carolinian modernists and preservationists can be likened to what Vincent Caretta calls "white amanuensis" in his examination of eighteenth-century white-transcribed black autobiographies such as that by Olaudah Equiano.[34] Caretta asserts, "One of the greatest challenges in dealing with these writings as historical or literary documents is trying to identify the 'black message in a white envelope'" (77). Further complicating these issues of authorship, appropriation, and privilege, the language of the Gullah was typically the first learned language of white aristocrats. Like other white members of Charleston's elite, Pinckney's childhood years were primarily spent with Rutledge, on whose shoulders the responsibilities of child-rearing were placed and whom Pinckney described "as much a part of my life as the walls of my room" (111). Pinckney's comparison of Rutledge to the physical walls of a domestic space recalls her use of architectural structures in poems such as "Thread Flowers"

[34] Caretta notes that of the seven known black autobiographies written—that is, white-transcribed—during the eighteenth century, five of them are directly tied to the lowcountry.

and "Palimpsest" to signify invisible human narratives. As significant as modernists and preservationists like Bragg, Frost, and Lowell were to Pinckney's development as a modernist writer, the earliest foundation of her poetic education came from Rutledge. Upstairs Pinckney learned the formal syntax of Victorian poetry from her parents; downstairs, in the kitchen, Pinckney learned the free-form chant and alternative syntax of Gullah from her caregiver. Because the lives of aristocrats and Gullah-Geechee domestic workers were so inextricably linked, Pinckney's preservation of Rutledge's genealogical artifact muddles the distinction between ethnography and autoethnography, recalling the palimpsest of subjectivities in Ravenel's "The Pirates."

While other Gullah-Geechee dialect poems in *Sea-Drinking Cities* describe African-American life through a romanticizing third-person detachment, it is curious that Pinckney included a poetic transcription of a celebratory folktale about a successful incident of slave resistance. The alternate depictions of Gullah-Geechee locals as both objects of observation and subjects of agency suggest that Pinckney grappled on some level with her own role in the suppression of African-American histories within Charleston's preservation landscape, a self-consciousness more clearly evinced in her loosely autobiographical 1930 short story "They Shall Return as Strangers," the title an allusion to Rudyard Kipling's poem "Recall" (1917) about the complex identity politics of imperialism.[35] Henry Fairfield, a native South Carolinian who has been living in New York, returns to reclaim an island that has been in his family for generations. The owners not having stepped foot on the land for fifty years since the Civil War, the island has been solely inhabited by five generations of Gullah descendants. Henry, "paraphrasing a spiritual which broke like a trout from the deep hole of his memory" (546), attempts to gather information from Adam, the primary custodian of the island, who immediately perceives the implications of

[35] Pinckney wrote the story in 1930. It was published in 1934 in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*.

the visit. The dialogic exchange between Henry and Adam temporarily recalls the plantation relationship between master and slave; there is a mutually tacit understanding that the loss of the old proprietorship will also mean the recurrence of displacement, though under the transfigured form of commercialism. Adam asks, "Master, are you going to sell this land?" (554) and "Maussuh, you fixin' to tek 'way my fiel'?" (555). Henry can only reassure Adam that he will be able to keep his land as long as the island stays in the Fairfield name, to which Adam asserts, "'Dis house been my-own too.' "He didn't thank Henry for what he regarded as his own" (555). When she wrote the story, Pinckney Island, near Hilton Head, was being sold by one of Josephine Pinckney's relatives who inherited it. Due to the money she lost during the Great Depression, Pinckney was unable to keep the land in the family name and prevent the likely displacement of the island's Gullah inhabitants (Bellows 153-154).

If one were to salvage one unifying characteristic of modern South Carolina poets—and perhaps American modernism at large—it might very well be negotiation between nostalgic reconstruction and creative destruction of the classical, colonial, or antebellum past. For the women of the PSSC in particular, the shifting methodologies of historic preservation and the innovative architectures of American modernism converged in a way that facilitated their sifting through layered scaffoldings of material, textual, and oral histories. Like the moveable architecture of a ship, their poetry inhabits simultaneously fluid and stationary voyages through pasts whose imprints may only be partially revealed through repeated assemblages and revisited definitions. As articulated by Faulkner, an iconic traverser of shipwrecked time, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

CHAPTER 2

"Contactual inspiration": Classic Blues and Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance

Critical discussions of early twentieth-century African American literature have long acknowledged the influence of black musical traditions on household names famously associated with the Harlem Renaissance, a literary and artistic extension of the so-called New Negro Movement during the 1920s and 1930s. Writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and Sterling Brown textually adapted spirituals, gospel, blues, and jazz music, although these writers' motives for incorporating black "folk" culture in their work were, of course, far from homogenous. Intellectual figureheads such as Du Bois and Johnson, whose literary and activist careers began well before the official advent of the Harlem Renaissance in 1920, held the view that African American oral traditions should be validated as evidence of a rich collective heritage; however, they believed that the modern black writer should use his elevated position to transform black oral traditions into "literary" English, or "high" art, in order to dismantle negative racial stereotypes (stereotypes reinforced by crude caricatures of a sophisticated oral culture) used by whites to justify racial violence and discrimination. Many of Du Bois and Johnson's more formally experimental counterparts, such as writers Hughes, Toomer, and Brown—members of the "younger generation" to whom Alain Locke dedicated his *New Negro Anthology* in 1925—celebrated the blues music largely created by the black working class as an assertion of racial pride and self-acceptance, partly rejecting what they perceived as assimilationist or elitist propaganda advanced by many of their older affiliates. While such debates significantly informed the diversity of the Harlem Renaissance as a

literary movement, a persistent commonality among many African American male authors writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relates to the ways they inventively responded to the blues and other vernacular forms in order to stake out gendered and racial identities for themselves.

Using art to circumvent racial stereotypes continued to be far more difficult for the African American woman author into the twentieth century. With the notable exception of Zora Neale Hurston, women writers of the Harlem Renaissance—particularly the generation of black women poets who helped catapult the movement during its earliest years—typically avoided the classic blues form and overt blues idioms employed by their younger male associates. Although sexuality had always been a major subject in the blues, themes of love and sexuality took on even greater prominence in the "classic blues" era of the 1920s, during which time the black record and theater industries were dominated by women singers and lyricists who presented sexuality in ways that diverged from male blues artists' typical depictions of heterosexual relationships (Davis 11), as well as from traditional narratives of love by male writers. These revised narratives of sexuality in classic blues became a source of dissention among factions of the black middle class who believed that secular music reinforced hypersexualized stereotypes of black women, which they worried would only further normalize racial inequality and sexual violence directed against African American women by whites. Many blues women's assertions of sexuality, including both heterosexual and homosexual relationships outside the confines of marriage, were so controversial that their songs were (and still are) sometimes described as "pornographic"—even though, Angela Davis points out, a notable characteristic of their lyrics is that they portray sexual encounters in which neither partner is exploited (14-15).

With their moral and professional reputations at stake, middle-class African American women poets associated with the New Negro Movement were largely restricted to outwardly conventional Anglo-European prosody. Like women affiliated with the late nineteenth-century black women's club movement, women of color in the early twentieth century continued to face marginalization on two fronts: "the widespread association of womanhood with the figure of the middle-class white female, and the similar association of Blackness with the figure of the African American male" (Mance 19).[36] As African American men sought a place for themselves in public spheres restricted to white males, including leadership positions in literary circles, the subject of black women's particular intersectional oppression was increasingly perceived as either inconsequential or antithetical to the racial struggle.[37]

Into the 1930s and 1940s, greater numbers of black women writers opted out of marriage and family and more visibly distanced themselves from the (often pejoratively described) "genteel" surfaces of domestic fiction and romantic poetry. For the majority of women poets whose writing careers had begun during and/or prior to the early 1920s, domestic duties such as childrearing meant, of course, fewer opportunities for independent, interregional travel than enjoyed by their male counterparts—geographic mobility often being an incitement (though not

[36] Ajuan Mance argues that the state of literary gender politics for African American women writers after the turn of the century had, ironically, regressed since the late nineteenth century; as a result, New Negro women writers abandoned many of the more controversial female subjects taken up by their late nineteenth-century female predecessors, who "were among the earliest writers of any ethnicity or gender to explore the social construction of gender and race" (54). As African American men continued moving into public spheres, there were fewer leadership opportunities for African American women in the literary world. During its tenure from 1894-1897, *The Woman's Era*, the official newspaper of the National Association of Colored Woman, was the only publication where black women could publish their work; however, its all-female staff allowed for a greater degree of authorial and editorial autonomy (McHenry 218-224).

[37] Since the early 1980s, black feminist critics have brought to light the challenges faced by women writers associated with the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance. Scholars such as Hazel Carby, Barbara Christian, and Ann Ducille (among many others) have demonstrated the importance of reading nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American women's intellectual and literary pursuits within the context of respectability politics, namely the unrelenting cult of true womanhood. In a recent multiethnic literary examination of New Woman ideology, Charlotte J. Rich shows how African American, Native American, Asian American, Latina, and Jewish women writers were restricted by, and subversively responded to, the ethnocentric biases and contradictions of Progressive Era feminism.

an absolute prerequisite) for aesthetic experimentation. The majority of Harlem Renaissance writers were from the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, including renowned blues poets like Hughes, Brown, and Toomer, who had little direct knowledge of southern black oral arts before conducting research in the Deep South in preparation for writing about the blues.[38] Hurston, a Florida-born writer and anthropologist, travelled more extensively throughout the American South and the Caribbean than perhaps any other modernist writer from the United States, collecting data on black folk culture. Hurston, however, was by no means emancipated from the complex sexual literary politics that would also relegate earlier women writers of the New Negro Movement like Jessie Redmon Faucet (1882), Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875), and Angelina Weld-Grimke (1880) to the margins of literary history for more than half a century.[39] It would be decades after Hurston's death before revived interest in her writing career brought to light her remarkable understanding of a blues aesthetic and the black feminist sensibility that went with it.[40] While debates about the racial politics surrounding Hurston's attitudes toward "primitivism" continue, Hurston scholarship has shown how her writings about the blues and black folklore have significantly helped complicate the traditionally understood binary between regionalism and modernism—a crucial precedent to contemporary spatio-cultural concerns in Harlem Renaissance studies.

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[38] In her discussion of the parallels between Bessie Smith and Zora Neale Hurston, Angela Davis posits that neither woman was "influenced by prevailing concerns about 'high art' or about making the African-American blues form palatable to white audiences" (156). Additionally, both Smith and Hurston's treatments of hoodoo, a subject featured prominently in Smith's lyrics and in Hurston's literary and anthropological writings, refuted "exoticized and sensationalized" (159) depictions of the religious practice imposed by dominant Anglo-European culture.

[39] Hurston's pioneering work as a novelist and anthropologist was widely dismissed due to her rejection of Eurocentric biases that had traditionally informed the social sciences and to her simultaneous refusal to enact certain rhetorical strategies and behaviors expected of female members of the African American elite.

[40] Alice Walker catapulted critical interest in Hurston when she published her 1975 article, "Looking for Zora Neale Hurston," published in *Ms.* magazine and reprinted in her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mother's* Gardens (1983).

In twentieth-century literary scholarship, the *Harlem Renaissance* is now widely accepted as a terminological placeholder for overlapping public and private articulations of black aesthetic(s) that took place across a range of geographical, multidisciplinary, and gendered contexts.[41] As recent criticism has expanded beyond the literal perimeters of New York, attention has progressively shifted toward extra-literary, feminist, queer, and performative borderlands that complicate traditional narratives of cultural traffic in black modernism. The contributions of women who ran "informal" literary collectives and worked in black performance venues are among the most compelling revisionist histories to emerge in studies of black women modernists in particular; due to the widely perceived opposition between the discourse of the black women's club movement and that of the classic blues, twentieth-century African American women's salon and performance cultures have rarely been examined in relation to one another, except in dichotomous terms.

Both middle-class black club women and working-class female blues artists responded to the contradictions in wider governmental and societal discourses that viewed African American women's sexual behavior, particularly that of urban migrant women, as a measure of public morality. In response to "the moral panic about the urban presence of apparently uncontrolled black women" (741), Hazel Carby posits, many members of "the emergent black bourgeoisie" (746), including middle-class African American women, "defined their social position by emphasizing their differentness from the lower class" (746). However, as Carol Batker has shown, neither the club women's movement nor classic blues narratives adhered to a consistent sexual ideology (202). Nevertheless, oversimplification of these two historical discourses has

[41] Paul Gilroy's pluralistic approaches to blackness and cosmopolitanism in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) anticipated the transnational turn in Harlem Renaissance studies. More recent scholarship on alternative literary spaces in the Harlem Renaissance include a collection of essays, edited by Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani, titled *Escape from New York: the New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem.*

persisted; and as a result, Batker argues, women writers such as Hurston, whose "text disrupts the neatness of middle- and working-class sexual polarities" (202), have been left out of critical discussions of the political debates that took place in the black women's club movement. "Like some forms of club discourse," Batker posits, "the classic blues also worked to regulate sexuality" (203), employing rhetorical moves that typically championed sexual assertiveness but also privileged monogamous heterosexual relationships and positioned women as the moral guardians of the home; many female blues artists presented additional narratives, however, that complicated these usual rhetorical measures, including songs about homosexual and non-monogamous relationships. Likewise, "The middle-class status of women involved in the black women's club movement did not always translate into conservative sexual politics" (201). For example, club women like Nannie Burroughs and Amy Jacques Garvey emphasized the dignity of working-class black women, criticized bourgeois elitism, and rejected idealized femininity (201-202, 211). Batker's position that Hurston simultaneously integrated club and blues discourses raises the question of whether black women writers who *did* seemingly embrace traditional literary models of respectability ever held similarly complex dialogic positions toward classic blues narratives.[42]

Two women poets of the Harlem Renaissance, Georgia Douglas Johnson and Anne Spencer, had literary careers that, to a great extent, directly manifested the behavioral ideologies projected onto the genteel New Negro woman writer. Johnson's romantic verse and her contributions to the genre of lynching plays—the latter closely associated with the black

[42] One can observe a disruption similar to what Batker locates in Hurston's work in blues songs such as Bessie Smith's rendition of "Take Me for a Buggy Ride," in which Smith combines intense sexual innuendo with references to marriage. "Take Me for a Buggy Ride" was co-written by blues artist Leola Pettigrew ("Coot Grant") and her husband Wesley Wilson. Angela Davis suggests that Smith's 1933 recording of that song, with its raunchy sexual allusions and references to matrimony, may indicate that Smith was attempting to reach both black and white audiences (15). Perhaps Smith, like Hurston, also sought to transcend barriers of intraracial class.

women's club movement in Washington, D.C., where Johnson lived for most of her adult life—reflect many of the concerns she shared with preeminent figureheads of the New Negro Movement, including her early mentor, William Stanley Braithwaite, and fellow civil rights advocate, W.E.B. Du Bois.[43] Spencer, who was a devoted librarian and civil rights activist, helped found, with the help of close friend James Weldon Johnson, the first NAACP chapter in Lynchburg, Virginia.[44] However, there are elements of each woman's personal background and literary output that point toward simultaneous parallels with particular demographic and thematic movements associated with the classic blues. Like the majority of blues women, who were born in small rural towns and launched their careers from the urban South, Johnson and Spencer were from the southern region and solidified their writing careers through an emerging black cosmopolitanism that they helped to reconfigure through the literary societies they organized. Johnson lived in Atlanta, Georgia for over thirty years before moving to Washington, D.C.; unlike most of her literary peers, she was simultaneously a member of the black cultural elite and a Southern migrant. Her D.C.-based "Saturday Nighters Club" at 1461 S Street, which began in 1921 and continued into the 1940s, was the longest-running and most widely respected literary gathering associated with the Harlem Renaissance, has not, until recently, emerged into the foregrounds of literary history.[45] Spencer—who intermittently travelled to D.C. to attend salon meetings at Johnson's home—transformed her own provincial residence at 1313 Pierce Street in

[43] In recent years, plays written by black women of the Harlem Renaissance have received more focused scholarly attention. Two notable examples of this scholarship are Taylor Hagood's *Secrecy, Magic, and the One-Act Plays of Harlem Renaissance Women Writers* (2010), which examines the role of secrecy in the production and reception of one-act plays written by Johnson and seven other black women writers affiliated with the Harlem Renaissance, and Koritha Mitchell's *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (2011), which investigates the political and spiritual uses of lynching plays in early twentieth-century black theater; Johnson is also one of the women playwrights examined in Mitchell's study.

[44] Both Johnson and Spencer's personal papers reveal that they contributed, either monetarily or through service, to the National Training School for Women and Girls—of which "atypical" club woman Nannie Burroughs was the head and founder.

[45] The Saturday Nighters Club began as an "informal study group" (McHenry 251) promoted by Jean Toomer in 1921. Later that same year, Toomer relocated to Sparta, Georgia, upon which time Johnson transformed the group into an intensive writing workshop (251).

the small Virginia town of Lynchburg into a vibrant literary and artistic salon, which ran from approximately from 1920 to 1938 (Green 67, 80), distinctive like Johnson's for its radical degree of socioeconomic, racial, aesthetic, and political diversity.[46]

African American women's positions as producers and consumers of popular culture underwent significant changes during the 1920s. Blues women such as Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith came to define American popular culture largely through networks of black theater circuits concentrated in southern cosmopolitan centers. While periodicals associated with the 1890s black club women's movement had significantly dwindled since the turn of the century, female blues singers became the primary focus of the increasingly popular entertainment sections of African American newspapers (Abott and Seroff 62), with blues performers like Rainey and Smith making regular headlines in the most widely distributed black newspapers in the country. Popular newspapers like the *Indianapolis Freeman* (Abott and Seroff 62) and the Baltimore-based *Afro-American*, as well as other periodicals written for middle-class black readers, included articles on racial uplift by black academics as well as accounts of blues women's performances in entertainment sections. As James Gregory posits, "There were many ways that the Great Migration changed gender relations, and the musically engineered shift in female iconography—from club women to blues women, from Ida B. Wells to Bessie Smith—was one of them" (Gregory 140). With the arrival of the classic blues, as LeRoi Jones (now Amiri Baraka) notes, the entertainment field allowed "an independence and importance not available in

[46] Only until quite recently have discussions of traditionally marginal figures like Johnson expanded beyond the "sub-field" of Harlem Renaissance women writers. Gloria Hull, Judith Stephens, and Claudia Tate have examined Johnson's work as a cultural sponsor in biographical terms; more recently, Elizabeth McHenry discusses Johnson's Saturday Nighters salon at length in her groundbreaking investigation of African American literary societies and book clubs, titled *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*. Only in more recent years has Johnson's salon gained comparable notoriety to literary gathering hosted by Wallace Thurman and white Harlem Renaissance patron Carl Van Vechen. One might initially speculate that this oversight is due to the fact that Vechten and Thurman's gatherings took place in New York City, the iconic emblem of early twentieth-century African American cultural production; however, A'Leila Walker's widely influential, salon, "The Dark Tower," was also in New York, yet next to nothing is known about it.

other areas open to [black women]—the church, domestic work, or prostitution" (93). By 1925, the *Afro-American* was the most widely distributed black newspaper in the nation's capital, a city viewed as the home base of the African American cultural elite (Gregory 130). New Negro women writers like Johnson and Spencer must have regularly come across this journalistic documentation of a burgeoning secular music industry that was, in contrast to Johnson's and Spencer's own literary circles, centered on black female-centric perspectives and concerns. Likewise, there is also evidence that blues lyricists and singers were concurrently reading New Negro literature focused on racial uplift ideology. For example, W.C. Handy, who wrote several of Bessie Smith's songs and sometimes toured with her, secretly distributed copies of black periodicals like *Voice of the Negro*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Indianapolis Freeman* during his travels as a minstrel-troupe bandleader (Scott 110).[47]

Not only were Johnson and Spencer part of a generation of African American women who witnessed and internalized these shifts in female cultural symbols, the literary societies they organized in Washington, D.C. and Virginia helped facilitate a comparable circuit of blues discourses in poetry throughout synchronous black collectives along the Atlantic coast. While recent scholarship in black modernism has revealed the significant roles that women cultural sponsors played as *facilitators* of creative collaborations among their younger male counterparts, a closer look at their concurrent roles as creative *participants*—and the direct impact of that participation on their own poetry and on that of their salon attendees—is equally critical. The dynamic of these salon gatherings—what Johnson referred to as "contactual inspiration"—led to

[47]Although historical newspapers helped document the extent to which the blues woman's commodified image infiltrated American popular culture, the ephemeral nature of live performances, especially in a period when recording technologies were still in early development, poses significant interpretive challenges. For one thing, firsthand accounts of live performances are not only limited in number, but also frequently present sexist, classist, and racial biases that make their narratives unreliable. The fragmentary ephemera left behind by African American women's salons is comparable to what Jeanne Scheper, in her study of race, gender, and modernist blues performance, calls the "uneven archive of the diva" (13).

a geographic dissemination of what we now recognize as the definitive blues poetry of the Harlem Renaissance era.[48] Furthermore, reading Johnson's and Spencer's own poetry into these contact zones of an African American blues aesthetic points to new interpretive strategies that uncover rhetorical and thematic resonances with the musical modernism of the classic blues. Like the "blue" note hovering in the liminal aural space between major and minor chord, their poetry synthesizes a range of seeming oppositions: club and blues discourses, traditional and modernistic alliances, and urban and rural Souths. It is time that we revisit these two southern Afromodernist women poets in the context of the rise of the female blues artist that coincided with their own literary activities.

Johnson and Spencer were crucial early mentors for the most famous blues writers connected with Harlem Renaissance, and the salons they ran were places where figures like Hurston, Hughes, Toomer, and Brown worked out their ideas before they found publishing success. Many publications associated with the Harlem Renaissance, including *Fire!!*, of which Hurston was a founding contributor, had their beginnings in the ephemeral exchanges that took place in Johnson's salon. Although Hurston did not publish her first book, *Mules and Men*, until 1935, she was one of the earliest members of the S Street salon and an admirer of Johnson's poetry, writing to Johnson in 1925, "This is my chance to say to you what a wonderful poet I think you are. No, what a soulful poet I KNOW you are" (Box 162-1, Folder 37). As did many young writers, Hughes and Toomer shared a special bond with Johnson, spending many Saturday evenings at her home, formulating ideas that would eventually take shape in works such as Hughes' *The Weary Blues* (1926) and Toomer's *Cane* (1922). Similar gatherings at Spencer's

[48] This description was made by Johnson in her "Catalogue of Writings" (Box 162-2, Folder 17). In that catalogue, Johnson also indicated that she planned to write a book (and possibly also a play) about the Saturday Nighters Club. However, she either never wrote it, or, more likely, the manuscript was lost. Tragically, the bulk of Johnson's unpublished manuscripts and personal papers were thrown away immediately following her death, with apparently no intervention from friends or family.

home provided young blues writers like Hughes and Sterling Brown access to country blues music performed in a local Southern context; likewise, Hughes and Brown, as well as other blues writers Spencer encountered in both the Lynchburg and D.C. salons, relayed their experiences about attending classic blues performances in urban spaces like D.C. and Harlem. While Brown was teaching at the Virginia Seminary and College between 1923-1926, he "relied on the Spencers' familiarity with the area and its people to become better acquainted with the myth and lore of southern blacks" (74-75). His collection of blues poetry, *Southern Road,* (1932) was deeply inspired by people and scenes he encountered in Lynchburg through Spencer.

Many central members in Johnson's and Spencer's salons were part of a group of writers deprecatingly labelled by some critics during the 1920s as the "Cabaret School." Members of the Cabaret School included Hurston, Hughes, Jean Toomer, Richard Bruce Nugent, Claude McKay, Wallace Thurman, Carl Van Vechten, and Rudolph Fischer, who were, Shane Vogel asserts, part of a "subterranean literary tradition within the Harlem Renaissance" (5) that turned to black nightlife performance to "untangle the normative ties of race, gender, and sexuality and imagine other models of social organization, relationality, and ethics than those deployed by the institutions of black middle-class respectability and representation" (13). Writers like Hughes and Toomer were profoundly affected by the black secular music being played in the streets and cabaret theaters of D.C., and served as conduits between the classic blues and literary salons. Hughes was first introduced to the blues when he moved in 1924 to D.C., where he immersed himself in Washington's black entertainment district on Seventh Street and attended live performances by blues artists like Alberta Hunter (Rampersad 202, 208-210). Washington's blues scene also features prominently in Toomer's *Cane*, including a prose poem titled "Seventh Street," as well as his short stories "Avey," "Box Seat," "Theatre," and "Bona and Paul."

Johnson herself wrote about a cabaret singer from Washington in her 1938 play, *Starting Point*, and was one of the first writers to feature a female blues singer in an American drama.

The queer politics surrounding the Cabaret School created an additional point of exchange among Johnson's and Spencer's soiree attendees, who represented a variety of opinions on black literary representation. Blues women like Smith and Rainey were admired by many queer writers of the Harlem Renaissance for songs like "Prove It on Me Blues" and "Sissy Blues" that validated lesbian and male homosexual relationships (Batker 206). Johnson's intimate connections to the queer subcultures of the Harlem Renaissance and New Negro Movement is particularly significant, as numerous gay/queer writers like Hughes, Nugent, Angelina Weld Grimke, Wallace Thurman, and Alain Locke were members of her salon; most of Johnson's friends were gay, lesbian, or sexually ambiguous, and she was a crucial source of professional and emotional support for young queer writers like Hughes and Nugent, who oscillated between her late-night salons (which often ran until after 3:00 a.m.) and D.C.'s black entertainment venues and queer urban spaces.

Mirroring the "urban cultural and social wetlands" (Ruble 3) of D.C.'s historically black neighborhoods, Johnson's and Spencer's literary careers "worried the line," to borrow Cheryl Wall's critical metaphor, of gendered, racial, and class binaries. Their salons transgressed social divisions by serving as democratic collectives where class-mixing (and sometimes racial mixing) occurred and where women held authoritative positions. Johnson and regular members of the Saturday Nighters Club were strongly motivated to move beyond the "elaborate social and cultural traditions of 'colored Washington'" (McHenry 252) in order to create a safe, welcoming space for both aspiring and published writers following the heightened racial tensions of WWI. The domestic spaces in which these salons were hosted also functioned as stopovers for African

Americans of all social classes who were travelling in or across the Jim Crow South. In Virginia, Spencer's salon was also a place where "'important' people" (Greene 68) and everyday individuals from across the eastern seaboard commingled. She offered her home as a "strategic stopover point between Washington and points north, and Nashville, Atlanta, and other points south" (Greene 67) for traveling African Americans who had difficulty finding accommodations outside of urban areas. Johnson and Spencer's domestic residences are comparable to the blues woman's performance venue, insofar as each was "a space in which they sometimes affirmed the dominant middle-class ideology but also could deviate from it" (Davis 47).[49] Like the *Crisis* magazine, Koritha Mitchell notes, Johnson's salon was an "alternative public space" (151) "in which various viewpoints could be shared" (150). From 1925-1934, Johnson worked for the Department of Labor; part of that job entailed evaluating the living conditions of laborers (164). Johnson also reached out to incarcerated men and encouraged them to attend her salon gatherings once they were released (Stephens 16). Like Saturday Nighters Club member Alice Dunbar-Nelson, who conducted war work among working class black women in the South (Brown, Nikki 207), Johnson was regularly exposed to working-class struggles. As McHenry argues, "Johnson simultaneously fulfilled the expectations of bourgeois respectability and expanded the boundaries of the world in which she lived" (275-76).

Mirroring the alchemy of aesthetic, political, sexual, and socioeconomic diversity represented in Johnson's S Street salon, Washington, D.C.'s regional categorization is similarly evasive; of course, as Gregory notes, "What makes a space seem southern can differ for whites and blacks" (8). Although D.C. offered greater economic opportunities for African Americans,

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[49] In her discussion of Johnson's work as a cultural sponsor in *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, Elizabeth McHenry contends that Johnson's salon "offered a rare, liberating combination of honest and open fellowship" that was both "friendly and constructively critical…important elements frequently missing from a movement that alienated individuals and undermined talent as often as it nurtured it" (252-53).

particularly women, through the federal workforce and higher education at Howard University, it was also "a segregated city lorded over by a Congress dominated by Southerners" (Ruble 3). During the first half of the twentieth century, the nation's capital was a hotbed of racial violence, and "in the 1920s it was where antilynching bills went to die" (Mitchell 9).[50] Recalling his time in D.C. in his autobiography *The Big Sea*, Langston Hughes remarked that "it has all the prejudices and Jim Crow customs of any Southern town, except that there are no Jim Crow sections on the street cars" (206).[51] Blues artists demonstrated that "the South was a region that was not so much defined geographically as it was culturally or by its politics of oppression" (Adams 37).

Johnson lived in the greater U Street district in D.C.'s northwest quadrant of historically black neighborhoods, an area defined by an "explosive and creative mix of class and background" (Ruble 8) during the era of segregation. The first black-owned theatre circuit started in the U Street area, making D.C. "the headquarters for many organizations that served as a control center for the national black entertainment" (Ruble 5). Centrally located in the U Street district was the Howard Theatre, which attracted African American and white audiences of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and featured a variety of "highbrow" and "lowbrow"

[50] Koritha Mitchell makes a compelling observation that most of the African American writers who turned from poetry and prose to the genre of lynching plays during the 1910s and 1920s were D.C. residents (9).

[51] The population of black women in D.C. grew exponentially by 800% between 1860-1930 (McHenry 273). Treva Lindsey's essay, "Climbing the Hilltop: In Search of a New Negro Womanhood at Howard University," provides a crucial discussion of New Negro women's activism at Howard University in the early twentieth century. Lindsey discusses how African American women administrators, educators, and students at Howard built on political and social movements during the 1920s and 1930s to form a unique political agenda that encompassed racial and gender equality. The focus of Lindsey's essay, Lucy Diggs Slowe, who took aim at the university for being "progressive on race, backwards on gender" (qtd. in Lindsey 280), used her position as the first official Dean of Women at the university and founder of the National Association of College Women, to work against institutional policies aimed at maintaining a racialized gender hierarchy. Slowe's partner, playwright Mary Burrill, was a prominent member of Johnson's S Street literary salon.

entertainment, including vaudeville, musicals, traveling shows, and circuses (Ruble 4).[52] While respectability politics may have dissuaded Johnson from joining the likes of Hughes, Toomer, and Richard Nugent on Seventh Street, the Howard Theatre was a popular entertainment venue among the social elite of Washington. It was a venue where a variety of definitions of a "black aesthetic" were represented, showcasing blues women like Alberta Hunter and Bessie Smith and plays written and produced by D.C.'s intellectual elite, including at least one of Johnson's own plays.[53]

Johnson officially named her row house at 1461 S Street "Half-Way House," explaining that she perceived herself as being "'halfway between everybody and everything and trying to bring them together'" (qtd. in Stephens 17). As an extension of Johnson's "versatile genius" (Hull 170) as a writer, her ability to meaningfully reach an astoundingly diverse group of thinkers was informed not only by the Southern contact zones of D.C.'s and Atlanta's black entertainment districts, but also by her personal experiences with racial, gendered, and ageist social biases that, as Elizabeth McHenry notes, made her "something of an anomaly" (276) in the Harlem Renaissance.[54] "Cosmopolite," from Johnson's second published volume of poetry, *Bronze* (1922), crystalizes the complex social identities she continually negotiated in her work:

> Not wholly this or that,
> But wrought of alien bloods am I,
> A product of the interplay
> Of traveled hearts.
> Estranged, yet not estranged, I stand

[52] The Howard Theatre was reopened in the 1930s by Duke Ellington (Ruble 4). What made it so significant was that its white owners hired black managers and gave them the freedom to run it as they saw fit, which was very unusual at the time (Ruble 4).

[53] As John Lowe contends, black performers began "to move away from minstrelsy and blackface toward more positive modes of representation. Minstrelsy and this new form of vaudeville gave black performers," including female blues singers like Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, "a chance to break into the American entertainment circuit" (18).

[54] As Elizabeth McHenry observes, Johnson's age contributed to her anomalous position in the group, as she was "old enough to have lived through the formation of the National Association of Colored Women and young enough to assume a key role as an impresario and author during the Harlem Renaissance" (276).

All comprehending
From my estate
I view earth's frail dilemma;
Scion of fused strengths am I,
All understanding,
Nor this nor that
Contains me.

Johnson was often preoccupied with her own racial hybridity, also a prominent theme in works by Jean Toomer, Angelina Weld Grimke, and other members of the "mulatto aristocracy" (McHenry 260) that was the demographic base of the Saturday Nighters.[55] In her chapter on Johnson's salon, McHenry argues that heightened national obsession with absolute racial categories during the 1920s—categories that did not "address the social and racial complexity embodied in light-skinned black people" (260)—prompted members of the Saturday Nighters to simultaneously interrogate "the conventional boundaries of genteel cultural production" (263) imposed upon them by their white ancestry and investigate their relationship to "those black people who, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, left the South and flooded northern cities as a part of the Great Migration" (260). Expanding Johnson's contemplation of her own "alien bloods," the poem's central metaphor of cosmopolitanism simultaneously evokes her complex geocultural identity: she was a respected member of the black intelligentsia but also a southern migrant, a "product of the interplay of travelled hearts." As the poem suggests, she inhabited an ambiguous position, "Estranged, yet not estranged" from precarious geographical and racial identities.

Despite the cosmopolitan dimensions of Johnson's physical world, she remained a self-professed "modern Southern poet"—and, more specifically, an "Atlanta Georgia poet" (pg. #)—

[55] The "Red Summer" of 1919 led to a heightened national obsession with racial categories; the category "mulatto" was removed from the U.S. census in 1920 (McHenry 262).

throughout her entire life.[56] Her nearly thirty-year residence in Georgia prior to her move to D.C. in 1910 also likely helped formulate her interest in Atlanta's black middle- and working-class cultural productions.[57] Like Howard University, Clarke Atlanta University, Johnson's alma mater, (James Weldon Johnson graduated from there in 1894) was part of a powerful cultural network of black colleges in the South; and like D.C., Atlanta is also one of the most significant black metropolises in the history of urban blues. Many classic blues artists, such as Ma Rainey, Ida Cox, and Lucille Hegamin were born in Georgia, and an overwhelming number of blues women, including Rainey, Smith, and Leola Pettigrew gained their initial notoriety while performing in juke joints around Decatur Street, which Ron Smith and Mary Boyle describe as "Atlanta's version of Memphis's Beale Street" (138). Following the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, the black middle classes increasingly distanced themselves from secular music, as its working-class performers and audiences were especially vulnerable targets of white terrorist activity. Helping to fuel racial violence and class biases, white evangelical prohibitionists filled white-owned newspapers like the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* with villainizing accounts of black bootlegging and secular music, describing the blues performed in venues such as Charles Bailey's 81 Theater (Bessie Smith's home base) as "demoralizing, wicked and the devil's music" (qtd. in Smith and Boyle 139). Nevertheless, in light of Johnson's aspirations as a songwriter and her nearly thirty-year residence in Atlanta, it is difficult to imagine that she did not observe that

[56] These quotes are taken from the preface to Johnson's fourth poetry collection, *Share My World* (1962), a "twilight volume" (Hull 207) that she self-published through a private printer. Johnson wrote the preface under the pseudonym Michael Victor Strong. Without the publicity that would have been offered by a publishing house, Johnson likely had difficulty finding an established writer willing to write a forward endorsing the collection; of course, there is also the strong possibility that Johnson's pseudonymous forward and use of a private printer reflect the poet's desire to exert full authorial control over what she probably knew would be her last published book.

[57] With the exception of the two years she spent in Ohio at Oberlin between 1902-1903, Johnson lived in the state of Georgia for over thirty years before she moved to Washington, D.C., with her husband Henry Lincoln Johnson in 1910. Most of those years were in Atlanta, where she attended Atlanta University and worked as a school principle.

"the blueswomen worked within an aesthetic tradition that recognized their right to speak" (Wall 18) among both male and female black audiences.[58]

In one of Johnson's unpublished poems titled "To Decatur Street," written under the pseudonym Thomas H. Malone and likely composed in the 1920s during prohibitionist attacks on Atlanta's black entertainment district, the poet speaker debunks the racial and class biases that ignited the moral panic surrounding Atlanta's growing population of urban black migrants. As Hazel Carby contends of racial surveillance in American cities during the Great Migration, "Black urban life was viewed as being intimately associated with commercialized vice because black migrants to cities were forced to live in or adjacent to areas previously established as red-light districts in which prostitution and gambling had been contained" (751-752). In the beginning of the poem, the speaker's description of Decatur strongly echoes prohibitionist rhetoric:

> Here's to the health of Decatur Street,
> Where vice and woe together meet,
> Where virtue flees on nimble feet,
> Where crime and sin each other greet (1-4)

As the poem continues, however, "Malone" progressively undermines such rhetoric by drawing attention to its problematic contradictions and inaccuracies, while at the same time also alluding to its intersectional roots in racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism. Decatur was, Smith and Boyle explain, a "multiracial and international business district" (96) largely comprised of African Americans and immigrants. After noting the progressive race relations among Decatur's ethnically diverse businesses, run by "Afric's sons and Russia's Jews" (5), the speaker proclaims, "O thoroughfare we know full well / You're not as black as some may tell." (9-10). In

[58] Johnson frequently wrote about Atlanta, particularly women civil rights activists, in her pseudonymous editorial column "Mary Strong Talks," which ran in a number of black newspapers in the Southeast. Among Johnson's personal papers include what appears to be an unpublished draft of an article titled "Former Atlanta Girl Makes Good," which details the career success of an African American woman who moved to D.C. (Box 162-5, Folder 21).

light of Atlanta's demographic changes, these lines intimate that the rapid influx of African Americans and foreigners into the South's urban centers, followed by the relatively moderate degree of social and economic autonomy they established, was viewed as a significant threat to many native Southern whites. In Johnson's 1938 play, *And Yet They Passed*, a young black man named Joe Daniels is arrested under the pretense of assaulting a white woman, though in reality the arrest is because he ran a bootlegging business, an unwelcome business competition that angered local whites. As a woman from the African American community asserts, "He oughta knowed they don't 'low no colored folks do no bootleggin' down here. That's white folks' business" (170). At the end of the play, Daniels is tortured with a blowtorch and then lynched by a white mob. In the poem, the speaker's use of the first-person pronoun in the line "thoroughfare *we* know full well" and the assertion that Decatur "is not as black as some may tell" allude to certain white "prohibitionists" whose real motives lie in eliminating competition from an illicit market previously run by whites. Moreover, these lines insinuate that "Malone" and other members of the middle-class have themselves patronized the very juke joint district they vilify. The poem's concluding six lines implicitly reprimand hypocritical factions of middle-class Prohibitionists, whose own behavior, "Malone" suggests, contradicts their sanctimonious attitudes toward the practice of bootlegging:

> On every road vice sometimes strays
> With you perchance it longer stays
> If here and there you see a friend
> With too much corn his knees should bend.
> And even though he reels and falls
> Like things are seen in gilded halls.

These lines suggest that moral categories are largely subjective, that the main factors that distinguish the "vice," "crime" (4), and "sin" (4) in Decatur from the illicit activities that occur in the "gilded halls" of the upper classes relate to stigmas of race and poverty.

Johnson's plan to submit "To Decatur Street" under the Malone pseudonym for publication suggests she may have feared its challenge to propriety and class stratifications might displease many of the leading uplift strategists whose support she could not afford to lose. The poem's final two words, "gilded halls," is a clear reference to Du Bois' essay, "Of the Training of Black Men" from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in which Du Bois writes, "Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls" (52). In that essay, as Houston Baker notes, Du Bois uses the image of gilded halls to describe a utopian world inhabited exclusively by black and white intellectuals, the "talented tenth" of each race (Baker 195). It is also just as likely that, as an active writer during a time when intimidating threats of violence and FBI surveillance permeated African Americans' everyday lives, Johnson undoubtedly took precautions to avoid falling victim to more sinister repercussions.[59] Put into place during the Hoover administration, F.B.I. "ghostreaders" closely monitored African American writers, including Johnson and Spencer, both of whom were interviewed by government agents. Johnson was contacted at least twice by the Bureau of Censorship regarding the One World Social Letter Club she ran under the pseudonym Mary Strong (Maxwell 87-88). Spencer was visited by the F.B.I. regarding allegations that she had close associations with members of the Communist party (Greene 95-96).[60]

During the 1920s, Atlanta's juke joint district became the subject of several popular blues songs, including Bessie Smith's "Preachin' the Blues," written and recorded by Smith in 1927. Using a "blasphemous tone," Smith likens blues performances to religious church rituals,

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[59] Immediately following the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, in addition to lynchings in the South, entire black neighborhoods were set on fire in states as far north as Illinois (Mitchell 149). W.E.B. Du Bois decried the racial massacre in "The Litany of Atlanta" immediately following the Atlanta Race Riot, published in JWJ's *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922).

[60] Spencer's biographer, Lee Greene, places her F.B.I. interview sometime between 1930 and 1955, a period in which "defenders of the status quo often branded those who spoke out against racial and social injustice as Communists" (95). It is highly likely that Spencer herself was a subject of suspicion, which Greene suggests "could have accounted for the heightened antagonism toward her" during that fifteen-year period (95).

challenging "the idea of the incontrovertible separateness of the two spheres" (Davis 129).[61] Assuming a pastoral position of authority from which African American women have historically been excluded, Smith counters a central tenet of normative uplift ideology: that the only way black working-class women can become respectable is by adopting bourgeois displays of sexual mores. Locating her pulpit "Down in Atlanta GA under the viaduct every day / Drinkin' corn and hollerin' hooray, pianos playin' 'til the break of day" (1-2), she inverts paradigms of conversion that assign moral authority exclusively to the middle classes:

> Let me tell you, I don't mean no wrong
> I will learn you something if you listen to this song
> I ain't here to try to save your soul
> Just want to teach you how to save your good jelly roll
> Goin' on down the line a little further now, there's a many poor woman down
> Read on down to chapter nine, women must learn how to take their time
> Read on down to chapter ten, takin' other women men you are doin' a sin (9-15)

Smith's assertion that she has something to "learn," or teach, her listeners from the pulpit of a barrelhouse performance insists that black women lacking formal education and monetary capital have valuable knowledge to impart to society at large. Coretta Pittman contends that Smith's music "argues, instead, not that working class African American women should *become* 'respectable' (observing middle class norms), but that they already *are* respectable (deserving of respect on their own terms)" (156). As seen in their treatments of Atlanta's blues district, both Johnson and Smith contest social reform movements like Prohibition that reinforce stratifications of gender, race, and class. Johnson's poem suggests that if one were to strip away the elite's social and economic advantages, the illicit activities that take place in barrelhouses and "gilded

[61] Johnson's geographical background and the suggested allusion to Smith's lyrics in "To Decatur Street" raises the question of whether her pseudonym Bessie Brent Winston was partly inspired by the "Empress of the Blues." Johnson appears to have written her most prolific pseudonymous work under the Winston alias, publishing at least three poetry books under that name between the late 1940s through the 1960s. The two books I was able to track down, *Alabaster Boxes* (1947) and *Life's Red Sea: and Other Poems* (1950), consist primarily of religious poetry and were published by a Seventh-day Adventist publishing house in D.C. As an interesting side note, toward the end of her musical career, Smith distanced herself from the blues and devoted herself entirely to gospel music, biographically paralleling Johnson's shifted focus toward religious poetry during the last two decades of her life.

halls" would be indistinguishable. Smith, who stressed the double connotations of language in her performances, alludes simultaneously to the pities of romantic heartache and the realities of material poverty in her declaration that "there's a many poor woman down" (13). Both Smith and Johnson illustrate that such social movements concerned with improving public morals exist next to and are limited by racial and class systems that impose harsh living conditions on many people.

Spencer's poem "Lady, Lady" similarly inverts culturally imposed hierarchies of class. Inspired by black domestic workers Spencer knew in her own Lynchburg community (Greene 46-47), the poem pays homage to the disproportionately large number of working-class black women whose limited opportunities incarcerated them to lives of grueling, underpaid domestic labor:

> Lady, Lady, I saw your face,
> Dark as night withholding a star…
> The chisel fell, or it might have been
> You had borne so long the yoke of men.
> Lady, Lady, I saw your hands,
> Twisted, awry, like crumpled roots,
> Bleached poor white in a sudsy tub,
> Wrinkled and drawn from your rub-a-dub.
> Lady, Lady, I saw your heart,
> And altered there in its darksome place
> Were the tongues of flames the ancients knew,
> Where the good God sits to spangle through.

Published in the 1925 "New Negro" issue of *Survey Graphic*, the poem was written during a period of intensive organizing among local communities of African American trade unionists throughout the South, a movement that gained most visible momentum in Virginia, where Norfolk and other coastal cities in the Hampton Roads area became "the birthplace of southern Garveyism" (Harold 208). The poem's focus on the subject's political invisibility, alluded to by images of starlight and firelight concealed by darkness, symbolizes a national dis-remembrance

of African American women. The kinds of employment available to most working-class black women in the South—which were primarily in domestic service—were not represented by the American Federation of Labor, which did not recognize the need to protect "unskilled" workers (Jones 146). Black women, already "an invisible part of the American racial landscape" (Pittman 152), were further sidelined from national discourse by the lack of formal representation in black and racially integrated unions.[62]

If Spencer's poem had not been published three years prior to Bessie Smith's 1928 recording of "Washwoman's Blues," one might assume that Spencer had written it in direct response to Smith's heart-rending performance of those lyrics. Nevertheless, the resonance between them speaks to the typically brutal conditions in which the majority of African American women were forced to work; furthermore, it demonstrates that some women poets of the Harlem Renaissance like Spencer—whose poetry has been persistently categorized as "raceless"—did at times write explicitly about working-class black women and in ways that rhetorically and thematically resonate with the class-conscious, Afro-feminist subtexts crafted by many female blues artists. By addressing the subject as "Lady," a word historically equated with "white middle-class womanhood" (Mance 34), Spencer inverts racist paradigms of respectability; not in spite of, but *because* of the subject's endurance of her oppressive circumstances, she is the true model of "class." It is possible that Spencer may have been familiar with female blues complaints that preceded Smith's, given that most recorded blues songs were at least partly derived from a folk inheritance of anonymous "stock" lyrics and subjects. Travelling black theaters, such as the Dudley Circuit, had theaters in D.C. and Norfolk

[62] Jacqueline Jones explains that while African American women were excluded from official union memberships, they were still fundamental, yet indirect, players in black labor movements; many, for instance, took jobs to support their families when their spouses were on strike. A few domestic labor unions gained some momentum in the elsewhere in the South during and immediately after WWI, but these efforts were soon thwarted by mass arrests and acts of intimidation by law enforcement (Jones 135).

(Scott 126). However, if Spencer ever did physically attend a female classic blues performance, it most likely took place at a traveling carnival, as Spencer is known to have visited at least one carnival during her lifetime, an excursion that inspired one of her earliest poems, "At the Carnival" (Greene 103-105). During the first third of the twentieth century, carnivals in the U.S. often had tent vaudeville shows featuring female blues singers, travelling annually below the Mason-Dixon line (Cullen 1044).

Spencer's assertion, "You had born so long the yoke of men," echoes the implicit message in "Washwoman's Blues" that domestic labor is "slavery reincarnated" (Davis 98).[63] "Washwoman's Blues," Davis asserts, is "an example of the way [Smith] and other blues women addressed gendered social issues that were rarely, if ever, formally acknowledged elsewhere" (101) and "a powerfully moving tribute to the countless numbers of African-American women whose toiling hands released their more prosperous white sisters from the drudgery of domestic work" (102). Aided by the element of repetition in classic blues structure, Smith's performance underscores the painful toll that excessive physical labor has taken on the domestic worker's body:

> All day long I'm slavin', all day long I'm bustin' suds
> All day long I'm slavin', all day long I'm bustin' suds
> Gee, my hands are tired, washin' out these dirty duds
>
> Lord, I do more work than forty-'leven Gold Dust Twins
> Lord, I do more work than forty-'leven Gold Dust Twins
> Got myself achin' from my head down to my shins
>
> Sorry I do washin' just to make my livelihood
> Sorry I do washin' just to make my livelihood
> Oh, the washwoman's life, it ain't a bit of good (1-9)

[63] Spencer relayed an incident of harassment to her biographer, Lee Greene, in which she recounted a time when she and her sister-in-law were verbally harassed by a trolley conductor, who called them "nigger washerwomen" (88) for refusing to sit in a trolley section designated for blacks.

To say that washing multiple families' laundry by hand, using only a washboard, was physically exhausting would be an understatement. The washwoman's declarations, "Gee, my hands are tired, washin' out these dirty duds" and "Got myself achin' from my head down to my shins" illustrate that the life of a laundress is one of chronic physical pain. Referring to her work as "slavin'" in the first verse, Smith makes it clear that women, particularly women of color, who perform this kind of grueling work do so because they have no other opportunities available to them for survival. Spencer, who was born on a plantation to first-generation free people and whose mother worked for a time as an inn cook, was keenly aware of slavery's historical and institutional nearness to race relations in the 1920s, referring to herself in a diary, "I, who had escaped chattel slavery by a hair" (Box 20, Folder 3).[64] Similar to the rhetorical pathos of Smith's lyrical inventory of pain, Spencer provides a vivid corporeal description of the subject's "Twisted," "Bleached," and "Wrinkled" hands.

In other poems, Spencer addresses the dangers of using social ostracism to enforce sexual morality, a practice she also witnessed in her local community. Spencer's poem "Innocence," published in Countee Cullen's 1927 anthology *Caroling Dusk*, focuses on the sometimes cruel, hypocritical enforcement of middle-class respectability politics. Spencer wrote the poem in response to a social scandal in Lynchburg involving an unwed teenage girl who became pregnant (Greene 90).[65] Rather than presenting the young woman as the subject of a cautionary tale, Spencer takes aim at members of the community who "seemed to gloat over the girl's misfortune" (90). Spencer's criticism of sexual policing mirrors a relational outlook consistent throughout the blues, a social model that "refrains from relegating to the margins any person or

[64] The diary itself is officially dated as the year 1927, but it originally belonged to someone else. Spencer's entries, though unfortunately undated, are clearly distinguishable from the handwriting of the diary's previous owner.
[65] Spencer indicated to her biographer, Lee Greene, that the poem was based on a real-life incident; however, it is not clear if the young woman on whom the poem is based actually died (90).

behavior" through narratives that "always decline to pass judgment" (Davis 133). As in her earlier poem, "Lady Lady," Spencer addresses the marginalized female subject as "lady," dismantling correlations between respectability and middle-class notions of true womanhood:

> She tripped and fell against a star,
> A lady we all have known;
> Just what the villagers lusted for
> To claim her one of their own;
> Fallen but once the lower felt she,
> So turned her face and died,—
> With never a hounding fool to see
> 'Twas a star-lance in her side!

Reminiscent of the symbol of the obfuscated star in her tribute to a female domestic worker, Spencer's assertions that the young woman "tripped and fell against a star" and that the community gossips were blind to the "star-lance in her side" imply that, like the politics of invisibility surrounding working-class black women, the circumstances of the girl's pregnancy—whether the result of rape, sexual coercion, or simply youthful naivety—are not considered by those who define respectability. In response, Spencer inverts traditional moral order by aligning the young girl with the poem's title, "Innocence," and pathologizing the primitive bloodlust of the "hounding" gossips.

Although Spencer was generally well-respected among writers and uplift strategists of the Harlem Renaissance, she disdained class snobbery and condescension, a deeply engrained principle that at times led to adversarial relationships with literary constituents, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, as well as family members and Lynchburg neighbors.[66] Born on a Virginia plantation in 1882 to parents with conflicting attitudes toward education and social mobility, Spencer's

[66] Spencer had a "warring friendship" (Greene 72) with W.E.B. Du Bois, whom she initially disliked due to what she perceived as condescension and snobbery toward working-class African Americans. According to Spencer's biographer, Lee Greene, "As hard as he may have tried at times, Du Bois could not interact personally and familiarly with lower-class or poor people, and could deal with them only on objective and intellectual terms…This man was a genius, Mrs. Spencer said, in a country which intellectually castrated his genius and which would not let him live a life for which his more than middle-class attitude yearned" (71).

complex understanding of race and class informed her individualist philosophy. Her mother went to great efforts to provide her daughter with formal education and took great pride in her paternal white parentage. Spencer's father eschewed working for whites at all costs and ran a "'rough bar'" (Greene 5) patronized by white working-class immigrants. When she was not in school, Anne Spencer spent a great deal of time in her father's saloon as a small child, where she would often perform for the bar's patrons in exchange for coins (5). As an adult, her marriage to Edward Spencer was initially met with disapproval by certain friends and family members because of Mr. Spencer's dark complexion and working-class background (Greene 42).[67]

Spencer's literary interest in marginalized and working-class African American subjects extended from her lifelong commitment to civil rights activism, but it also reflected the "contactual inspiration" of her relationships with blues poets, including her close friend Langston Hughes. "More than any of her literary friends," her biographer notes, "Hughes allowed her to be herself" (Greene 75). The two poets admired one another's work and often exchanged poems for mutual critique (Greene 75). In his 1926 essay, "The Negro Artist and Racial Mountain," Hughes called for other black writers to recognize performers like Smith as the keystones of the Harlem Renaissance. He also wrote poetry about black female domestic workers and clearly shared Spencer's interest in portraying the daily lives and frustrations of working-class African American women. It seems more than coincidental that Spencer published "Lady, Lady" in *Survey Graphic* in 1925, not long after she and Hughes had solidified their friendship (Greene

[67] Though not a literary writer, Edward Spencer was a highly creative person in his own right. He frequently salvaged used materials and transformed them into intricately designed architectural features and decorative accents for the Spencers' home, including a mosaic mantel inscribed with lines from Anne Spencer's poems (Greene 44). Today the Spencer home at 1313 Pierce Street is a popular house museum, attracting many tourists eager to admire Edward Spencer's beautiful craftsmanship and, of course, Anne Spencer's famous garden and writing cottage (the latter built by Edward). In contrast to Georgia Douglas Johnson's methodical record-keeping of drafts, manuscripts, and correspondence, Spencer maintained a haphazard approach to nearly all of her writing. Complementing her husband's adaptation of everyday found objects, Spencer typically used whatever random scraps of paper were on hand, including bills, pamphlets, received letters, and even other people's discarded diaries.

75). Earlier that year, Hughes's poem "Song to a Negro Wash-Woman" had appeared in *Crisis*. In Hughes' poem, he records his observations of laundry workers across various parts of the country, including those he has seen riding the "New York subway train" and others whom he recalls walking to work on "Vermont Street" in his hometown of Lawrence, Kansas. Although Hughes and Spencer generally adhere to different poetic styles, there is some resonance between Spencer's narrative diction and perspective in "Lady, Lady" and those in Hughes' poem, the first two stanzas of which are below:

> Oh, wash-woman
> Arms elbow-deep in white suds,
> Soul washed clean,
> Clothes washed clean,—
> I have many songs to sing you
> Could I but find the words.
>
> Was it four o'clock or six o'clock on a winter afternoon,
> I saw you wringing out the last shirt in Miss White
> Lady's kitchen?
> I don't remember. (1-10)

Hughes' line, "*I saw* you wringing out the last shirt in Miss White / Lady's Kitchen" echoes Spencer's assertions, "Lady, lady, *I saw* your hands" and "Lady, lady, *I saw* your heart," illustrating that the speaker's observations in each poem are as important as the observed subjects themselves. Spencer's detailed attention to the subject's deformed hands and Hughes' list of specific city streets and attempts to recall the specific times he observed the laundry worker ("Was it four o'clock or six o'clock") connote the act of documentation; while readers are not given any information about the poems' speakers, it is clear that they, narrated in first-person, are deeply affected. Spencer's emphasis on the subject's interior life, the thoughts and feelings "hidden" in her mind and heart, and Hughes' Whitmanesque proclamation, "I have many songs to sing you," convey a deeply intimate sympathy, *worrying the line* between the act

of documentation (denoting objective distance) and the act of witnessing (denoting subjective closeness). In contrast to Hughes' nameless yet familial portraits of black American domestic workers, he refers to their white employers with an ironic detachment in the lines, "Miss White / Lady's kitchen." Hughes' visual separation of "Miss White" from "Lady's" through the use of enjambment deliberately adds syntactical ambiguity regarding whether the speaker is assigning the title of "Lady" to the poem's black domestic subject or to her white employer. Spencer's unconventional application of the title, "Lady," suggests that her poem is, in part, an extension of the dismantled racialized constructions of womanhood in Hughes' tribute to the everyday hardships of America's unsung female black working-class.

In addition to her friendship with Hughes, Spencer's association with Sterling Brown illustrates another reciprocal exchange of cultural knowledge relating to urban and provincial blues in the Upper Southeast. Brown's poem, "Odyssey of Big Boy," from *Southern Road*, was inspired by a country blues singer from Lynchburg known as John "Big Boy" Davis, whom he watched perform in the Spencer home (Greene 74). In an undated letter to Spencer, probably written sometime between 1926-1929, Brown vividly describes his walks around "old familiar streets" and an excursion to the "Howard Theater vaudeville" during a brief return to D.C.[68] He recounts for Spencer the acts of the vaudeville show, including a female blues singer "with a voice in keeping with washerwoman arms – and the unabashedness to sing about her 'teeth being pearly' with a solid front of gold" (Box 1, Folder 3). Although he does not name the singer, Brown makes two clear references to Bessie Smith. In addition to alluding to "Washerwoman's Blues," he references the line, "My eyes are brown, my teeth are pearly white" (11), from the

[68] The letter was probably written between 1926, the last year of his teaching stint at Virginia Seminary, and 1929, the year he began his forty-year career at Howard University. During most of that three-year gap, Brown held a teaching position in Missouri, but returned to his native home in D.C. at least once for dental work.

song, "New Gulf Coast Blues," written by Clarence Williams and recorded by Bessie Smith in 1925.

In light of Johnson's own close association with Hughes and other members of the "Cabaret School," black secular music was undoubtedly a regular topic of discussion at Johnson's weekly soirees. Moreover, Johnson was actively involved in the New Negro little theater movement, a period in which black amateur theaters spread across the country. Although issues of dialect and representations of black people were major topics of debate between the "academic" and "folk" schools of black theater, the genre's emphasis on aural language and regional black communities allowed African American women writers like Johnson to produce work that was "both woman-centered and racially conscious" (Stephens 13) and that represented "all classes of black people" (13). Through her deft fusion of "academic" and "folk" schools of New Negro theater, Johnson demonstrated "her skill in reproducing human speech" (10) and gave the little theatre movement "a focus on the struggles of black southern women" (21).[69] Her 1938 play, *Starting Point*, listed among her "Plays of Average Negro Life" in her catalogue of writings, features "one of the earliest portrayals of the female blues singer in American drama" (Stephens 27). In that play, a young man named Tom travels from D.C. to Charleston, South Carolina to visit his parents, bringing his new wife, Belle, a cabaret singer. During the visit, Tom's parents are devastated to learn that he has dropped out of medical school and become involved in the numbers game. Already surprised by Tom's announcement that he has eloped, Martha and Robinson are further startled by the "rowdy" working-class blues song that Belle can

[69] Du Bois, of the "academic" school, advocated that black playwrights should focus on exposing racial violence and discrimination, while Locke, a proponent of the "folk" school, urged African American playwrights to create plays centered on characterization, rather than political protest (Stephens 12). Johnson, Judith Stephens asserts, often "combined both types in a single work" (12) and wrote a number of plays that center on middle-aged African American women, which "placed a generally ignored population on the American stage" (20). In her introduction to Johnson's selected plays, Stephens offers a comprehensive introduction to Johnson's career as a playwright and its relation to the historical contexts of the Little Theatre Movement, the New Negro Renaissance, and "native" American theatre.

be heard singing offstage, momentarily interrupting their argument with their son: "*Belle's voice is heard in a popular blues song off stage. All three lift their heads with varying expressions. Father and Mother taken aback look askance at each other because of the type of song and rowdy music*" (121). Tom proudly declares, "That girl's a wow! She sure can sing. Knocked 'em cold in Washington!" (121). Belle's role in the relationship is that of moral compass, demanding that Tom tell his parents the truth about dropping out of medical school and urging him to quit the numbers game and take over his father's job as a bank messenger in Charleston. Here, Johnson enacts a rhetorical move similar to Hurston's in the latter's portrayal of Janie's grandmother, Nanny, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. As a working-class black woman from the South and a survivor of slavery and sexual violence, Nanny, Batker posits, is someone whom many club women would have assumed was morally corrupt (205). "Nanny's position as moral guardian is revisionist" (205), Batker posits, in light of the parallels between Nanny's attempts to regulate Janie's sexuality and definitions of respectability and a great deal of club discourse.

Unlike Johnson's playwriting career, in which she was able to explore issues of identity particular to southern black women, her "niche as a woman poet" (Hull 178) and the expectations of traditional poetic form did not allow her the same degree of freedom when it came to linguistic experimentation or exploring connections between dialect and class/gender politics in her poetry. However, Johnson's persistent focus on themes of sexuality in her poetry, thinly veiled behind genteel romantic tropes, invokes the erotic narratives in a great deal of classic blues discourse, which often "plays with the opposition between respectability and sexual assertion" (Batker 203). As Ma Rainey's biographer, Sandra Lieb, contends, Rainey crafted a lyric and stage persona that was "both maternal and erotic," "nurturant, yet sexual," and "combined eros and homeliness" (170). While these characteristics would have been viewed as

irreconcilable oppositions by a number of uplift strategists, Du Bois for example, by synthesizing these false dualities, Rainey and other blues women forged new cultural symbols that were "different from minstrel stereotypes of suffering mammies, tragic mulattoes, 'sepia lovelies, and hot-blooded sexpots" (170).[70] Davis suggests that blues women have been marginalized because their songs revolve predominantly around themes of love and relationships with men. Masculinist bias fails to register "the ideological implications" (44) of their lyrics "and the female reception of their work" (44).

While Johnson's contemporary readers praised her poetry's surface narratives depicting genteel femininity, they skirted subtle yet discernible elements of female sexuality that are consistent throughout her work. Claudia Tate argues, "Despite the fact that Johnson is everywhere concerned with eroticism, this term is effaced in commentaries about her work—probably because her contemporaries feared that any mention of sexuality would invite the racist stereotype of the essential licentiousness of black people" (xix). In William Stanley Braithwaite's forward to the 1918 *The Heart of a Woman*, he writes, "whether the form or substance through which it articulates be nature, or the seasons, touch of hands or lips, love, desire, or any of the emotional abstractions which sweep like fire or wind or cooling water through the blood, Mrs. Johnson creates just that reality of woman's heart and experience with astonishing raptures" (ix). A decade later, Alain Locke's forward to Johnson's third published poetry volume, *Autumn Love Cycle* (1928), suggests another carefully strategic reading of her poetry, with its sexually charged metaphors. As Tate observes, Alain Locke "detected a libidinal impulse in her verse beyond maternal devotion" (xx). Locke obliquely gestures toward the volumes erotic themes in his assertion that Johnson "probes under the experiences of love to the

[70] When Smith auditioned for Black Swan records, she was vehemently dismissed because she was too "rough." W.E.B. Du Bois was on that label's board of directors (Pittman 147).

underlying forces of natural instinct which so fatalistically control our lives" (xviii), adding that "between the antagonisms of the dual role of Mother and Lover, we may suspect the real dilemma of womanhood to lie" (xviii-xix).

Braithwaite and Locke's avoidance of the "ideological implications" of Johnson's poetry is not unlike the historical reception of the classic blues, whose own political subtexts are continually ignored in favor of simplistically literal interpretations of their songs' romantic narratives. Braithwaite's and Locke's references to sublimated "desire" and "natural instinct" call to mind poems such as "Recall" from *The Heart of a Woman*, in which Johnson uses language highly suggestive of the progressive stages of sexual climax: "Almost! The thrill that your dear lips stirred, / Almost!! That wild pulsing throb again— / Almost!!!— (6-8). Like Tate, Hull locates erotic themes in *The Heart of a Woman*, but also demonstrates the presence of additional subtexts throughout that volume relating to women's common experiences of renounced ambitions and desires as a result of being trapped in an unhappy marriages (156-159).[71] In "Celibacy," from *Autumn Love Cycle*, Johnson all but pointedly criticizes the repression of female sexual desire: "In my body stamping around, / In my body like a hound / Leashed and restless— / Bidding time!" (3-6). Although she includes poems about motherhood in *The Heart of a Woman* and *Bronze*, that theme is strikingly absent from *Autumn*. Locke's reference to the "antagonisms of the dual role of Mother and Lover" in his forward to Johnson's third volume is perplexing, given Johnson's sole focus on erotic narratives in that work. This suggests that the transgressive themes of sexuality in Johnson's poetry, which was often criticized as "trite" and "cliché" was by no means lost on her male constituents.[72]

[71] Johnson's husband, Henry Lincoln Johnson, disapproved of her writing career, believing his wife should restrict her focus entirely to the home and child-rearing (Hull 160).
[72] The words "trite" and "cliché" proliferate the editorial comments on Johnson's drafts.

Comparable to the way commentators on *Heart of a Woman* were "distracted," intentionally or not, by the volume's title and unable to recognize Johnson's "deconstruction of romantic love" (Tate li), Johnson's second poetry volume, *Bronze: a Book of Verse* (1922), "distracts its readers with the standard racial fare" (liii). Critics such as Hull, argue that Johnson's third volume "reads like obligatory race poetry" (160), viewing the exerted displays of Johnson's classical education, its emphasis on maternal love, and a section comprised of tributes to male, female, and institutional figureheads of late nineteenth-century racial uplift as evidence of Johnson's insincere poetic voice. While in many respects *Bronze* shifts strongly toward the academic idioms of club women's discourse, it simultaneously explores socially transgressive subjects such as abortion in "Black Woman," anticipating later African American women poets like Gwendolyn Brooks and Lucille Clifton. The volume's section titled "Motherhood," Johnson told Arna Bontemps, "has as its basic note—black children born to the world's displeasure" (qtd. in Hull 160). Hull interprets the poem as adhering to narratives in lynching plays of black women deciding to never conceive children in order to avoid bringing children into a world of racial hatred and violence. However, certain lines in the poem, such as "Wait in the still eternity / Until I come to you" (5-6) and especially "Be still, be still, my precious child, / I must not give you birth!" (15-16) suggest that conception has already occurred and that the speaker wishes to terminate an already existent pregnancy.

While classic blues singers may not have directly broached medical abortion specifically, they strongly alluded to other taboo subjects, such as lesbianism and adultery, in songs that asserted black women's sociosexual autonomy. In D.C., as elsewhere, illegal abortion was paradoxically commonplace and taboo, an open secret that a woman of Johnson's social standing would seem the least likely to publicly acknowledge. However, there is evidence to suggest that

Johnson followed abortion-related court cases and legislative disputes that preceded Roe vs. Wade. Johnson dedicated her last published poetry collection, *Share My World* (1962), to Dorsey K. Offutt, who served as defense attorney in the 1954 trial against Dr. Henry Peckham for performing illegal medical abortions (Miller 27).

Similar to Johnson's poetry, her own personal life was, by all appearances, a model of middle-class respectability; yet those close to her knew that, in reality, her life both adhered to and deviated from this ideology. Alice Dunbar-Nelson, for instance, wrote of Johnson's unhappy marriage to Henry Lincoln and speculated that Johnson had had an affair (Hull 175). While accounts of Johnson's romantic life are minimal, it is known that she did have an extramarital affair with W.E.B. Du Bois (also married), a relationship that began several years before Johnson's husband died in 1925 (Lewis 520-521).[73] While it is not certain exactly when Johnson and Du Bois began their affair, it is puzzling that Du Bois wrote such an insulting forward to *Bronze* (1922), in which he characterizes Johnson's poetry as "simple," "sometimes trite," and weakened by "reiteration and over-emphasis" (85). Du Bois' forward comes across as a deliberate attempt to distract readers from the volume's erotically charged content by introducing the collection as simply the work of a mediocre amateur. If the affair had already begun prior to the book's publication, perhaps he recognized some allusion to his romantic relationship with the poet that he may have feared would threaten the "Du Boisian layers of public virtue and personal rigor" (Lewis 521).[74]

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[73] According to Du Bois' biographer, David Levering Lewis, by the 1920s, Du Bois "seemed ever more driven to exploit the enormous fascination he exercised over many women, a fascination intensified in the eyes of some by Du Bois' advanced ideas about women's rights" (521). In addition to Johnson, Du Bois' long list of lovers also included Jessie Redman Fauset (524).

[74] Spencer's poetry has been similarly described. In the 1973 Norton Anthology of Modern poetry, the editors described her verse as "'close to obviousness,'" "'nearly trite,'" and "'echoing routine feelings'" (qtd. in Greene 149).

A published songwriter, Johnson frequently drew from her extensive classical training in music when writing her poetry; out of all her poetry collections, *Bronze* mostly visibly showcases her musical background, including a "sanctus" of praise in the form of a sonnet dedicated to Du Bois' accomplishments as a scholar. In contrast to her published poetry, in which Johnson usually incorporates classical musical terminology or references to instrumental composition, the musical elements in her unpublished poetry more often center on female vocals. Among her personal papers are numerous unpublished poems featuring solitary female singers or aging female subjects who find themselves increasingly marginalized as they advance in years, including such titles such as "The Singer" (Box 162-7, Folder 12), "Song of the Old Woman" (Box 162-7, Folder 13), and "Song of a Spinster" (Box 162-7, Folder 13). One such poem, titled simply "My Song," reads as a response to the numerous dismissive criticisms of her poetry as being trite and presents a narrative about the importance of the individual:

> I never made a mighty ode
> Preponderant and strong
> I only sang a little lay
> To cheer my heart along.
>
> So down the street of life I whirl
> A trifle jauntily
> For just the tiniest of tunes
> Can help so mightily.
>
> A little song from out my heart
> I've sung with little voice
> I only hope some lonely soul
> Shall hear it to rejoice.

The poet speaker's self-deprecating phrases "little lay," "tiniest of tunes," and "little song" convey unmistakable irony. Lawrence Levine posits, "The blues insisted that the fate of the individual black man or woman, what happened in their everyday 'trivial' affairs, what took place within them—their yearnings, their problems, their frustrations, their dreams—were

important, were worth taking note of and sharing in song" (qtd. in Davis 119). In this way, the poem reads as *defiantly* "trite" in response to dismissive allegations that Johnson's poetry failed to meet the standards of "genius" defined by the Harlem Renaissance's preeminent male strategists.

Through classic literary tropes and clichés, Johnson fuses multiple meanings. Her attraction to short secular homilies extends well beyond her poetry; as is clear from her diaries, letters, and notes, she surrounded herself with motivational clichés, "simplicities that living had brazened true" (Hull 186). As Hull suggests, while Johnson's use of clichés will seem outmoded to contemporary readers, she was part of a generation of Americans who heavily relied on inspirational clichés to help them cope with the devastations of two world wars and the Great Depression (185). Ronald Schleifer argues that "high modernist" writers and composers emphasized extreme innovation and individuality in response to their sense of displacement in the face of modernity; the "everyday modernism" of post-WWI popular music, however, uses clichés to draw attention to "ordinary unhappiness" (31), particularly the struggles of women and ethnic minorities, who benefited in many ways from modern industrial progress. In classic blues of the 1930s, Billie Holiday, who had little control over the prosodic content of the mostly male-authored songs she sang—many of which contained lifeless clichés—fused verbal and nonverbal modes of expression (173) to create subsurface meanings in "cipher-clichés" (9). As Paul Allen Anderson posits, "The highly skilled blues or jazz singer can stretch and make elastic the cognitive distance between a song's lyrical subject matter and the content of the performer's idiosyncratic performance," an "elastic stylization" created "through personalized and often improvised signals of artifice" (182). Transforming cliché into code, Johnson employs lyrical

strategies similar to the cryptographic moves and elastic stylization crafted by female blues artists to create double meanings.

In the title poem of Johnson's first volume, *The Heart of a Woman*, she alters the syntax of popular clichés, embedding them in a narrative that challenges the easy application of those proverbs in a real-world—and gendered—context. As Tate has observed, the poem's extended metaphor of the caged bird clearly invokes Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poem, "Sympathy," but unlike Dunbar's use of bird imagery to convey undeterred perseverance against racial injustice, Johnson's fowl image portrays a "female pathos" of surrendered ambition under the familial expectations and emotional weight of "gender confinement" (l). Along with synthesizing literary allusions to post-Reconstruction African American and Wordsworthian Romantic poetry (Tate l), Johnson transforms clichés into connotative codes:

> The heart of a woman goes forth with the
> dawn,
> As a lone bird, soft winging, so restlessly on,
> Afar o'er life's turrets and vales does it roam
> In the wake of those echoes the heart calls home.
>
> The heart of a woman falls back with the night,
> And enters some alien cage in its plight,
> And tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars
> While it breaks, breaks, breaks on the sheltering
> bars.

At the end of the first stanza, the line, "In the wake of those echoes the heart calls home," alludes to the aphorism, "Home is where the heart is," a truism upholding that the place to which one bears personal allegiance is determined by where one feels the strongest ties of affection and belonging. The simile in the preceding lines comparing the "heart of a woman" to a searching solitary bird suggests that the concept of homestead—whether defined by geographic boundary or cosmopolitan community—is neither a permanent nor universal experience. The phrase,

"wake of those echoes," denotes that for the female subject in particular, "home" is eventually replaced by an aftermath of absence. Similar to Johnson's portrayal of cosmopolitanism and displacement in her poem, "Cosmopolite," her reformulated clichés in "The Heart of a Woman" connote the gendered limitations imposed on the migrant woman writer of color, whose sense of geocultural belonging is always tenuous. In the poem's second stanza, the cliché, "Reach for the stars," is similarly evoked by the image of a caged female psyche that "tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars," signifying that such goals are not equally accessible to all.

As exemplified in the title poem, the majority of Johnson's poetic narratives in *The Heart of a Woman* unfurl within the confines of "articulate helplessness" (Hull 158) and "tragic introspection" (Tate lii). However, it is the poet's continual reassertion of her tragic experiences that counteracts, rather than reinforces, this helplessness. In spite of the speaker's emotional suffering and confinement, she nevertheless musters the strength and conviction to keep articulating them, similar to the "emancipatory process" (Davis 135) of the insistent refrain in a blues song. Johnson also synthesizes multiple meanings by fusing personal and anonymous experiences. As Davis argues of Smith and Rainey's music, "the personal relationship stands both for itself and for unrealizable social aspirations and failed dreams" (106). In Rainey's "Blame It on the Blues," the lyric speaker pronounces, "Can't blame my husband, can't blame my man / Can't blame nobody, guess I'll have to blame it on the blues" (lines 17-18). In "Any Woman's Blues," Smith asserts, "I feel blue, I don't know what to do / Every woman in my fix is bound to feel blue, too" (lines 7-8). The aversion to naming in these songs gestures toward systemic racial oppression without naming it explicitly, allowing the female blues singer to draw attention to sociopolitical issues and create communities around them safely (Davis 112-113).

Johnson's fusion of personal and anonymous truths largely derives from her conflation of external and interior spaces. Descending from the African American exodus narrative tradition, motifs of imprisonment in country and classic blues (Davis 102) and escapist impulses in literature of the Harlem Renaissance reflect persistent themes in black modernism concerned with "the relationship of the interior quest to public space" (Pavlic 80). Both masters of the interior quest, Johnson and Langston Hughes frequently employ wildlife elements to illustrate this psycho-spatial relationship. Reminiscent of Johnson's captive bird in "The Heart of a Woman," Hughes' bird image in his poem, "Dreams," similarly fuses exterior movement with interior restraint: "Hold fast to dreams / For if dreams die / Life is a broken-winged bird / That cannot fly" (1-4). In Johnson's poem, "Escape," Edward Pavlic locates a "complex blues self on the run in the dark night of the soul" (90), describing Johnson's lyric voice as a "feminine version" (91) of Robert Johnson's blues song, "Hellhound on my Trail" (91), which is often interpreted as expressing the anxieties that arise from perpetually fleeing lynch mob violence. Johnson's "Escape," Pavlic argues, "reformats the common nineteenth-century image of the fugitive to a deeply modernist, internalized twentieth-century form" (91).

Spencer similarly incorporates revised fugitive elements throughout her work, particularly in her garden poems. As Evie Shockley contends, prevailing assumptions about the absence of race in Spencer's poetry have precluded readers from seeing her subtextual as well as her recognizably black elements (137-138). In response to Spencer's leanings toward pastoral subjects, white editors have historically grouped her among other black writers whom they contend "write like whites" (qtd. in Shockley 122), insensible, Shockley stresses, to the fact that nature is both "gendered and raced" (121).[75] Like the spatial and lyrical arenas of the blues

[75] In her discussion of Spencer's literary reception, Shockley quotes from the white editors of the 1971 anthology, *Cavalcade: Negro American Writing from 1760 to the Present*.

woman's performance, Spencer's garden is simultaneously "a retreat from and model of the social world" (128), a black female space in which race is often a veiled, yet potent, subtext. In her poem, "Po' Lil' Lib," Spencer explores an Afrofeminist blues dynamic between interiority and public space within a naturalistic setting:

> Half-inch brown spider,
> black-spotted back
> Moves thru the grass,
> white-sheeted pack.
> M-O-V-E-S thru the grass, O god
> if it chance
> For the draught driven air turns leaf into lance (1-7)

An obvious reference to the Ku Klux Klan, the description of grass as "white-sheeted pack" emphasizes the racial violence permeating the U.S. Southern landscape, including Spencer's hometown of Lynchburg—which she sometimes referred to ironically as "Lynchville" or "Lynch-burg" (Greene 92). In the poem's final four lines, Spencer intersects the everyday terror of racialized violence with the constraints of gender by invoking the figure of Penelope from the *Odyssey*, who continuously reweaves a death shroud in order to stave off male suitors during her husband's twenty-year absence:

> Run, escape, wee one you are free…
> How delicately she re-knits her vast pain
> Chance did set her free
> What bound her again? (8-11)

Spencer's allusion to Penelope within a recognizably American subtext of racial violence reformulates this classical emblem of female domesticity and faithfulness as a black feminized version of the fugitive. Her chances for escape are circumvented by external forces and by her

own coerced self-imprisonment, exemplifying the "internalization of the political rather than the politicization of the personal" (Pavlic 90) characterizing black literary modernism.[76]

Occasionally, Spencer and Johnson present speakers that venture into public space. Johnson's unfinished poem titled "Free" is unusual in its daringly explicit portrayal of a geographically mobile black female subject situated in a cultural environment shaped by Jim Crow laws. While both middle- and working-class black women did frequently travel by train—though the latter also frequently worked as maids on the railway—African American women writers in the early twentieth century typically situated their narratives within domestic spheres or placeless abstractions. While segregation and harassment were, sadly, commonplace experiences among all black Americans, regardless of class, subjects pertaining to black female mobility and Jim Crow laws on the railway were more frequently presented by the female blues artist. Another atypical aspect of Johnson's poem relates to her depiction of psychological freedom, rather than helplessness or dejection, in response to restrictive circumstances, in this case, racial harassment:

> "A poet dreaming in the sun",
> Aha! there's other dreaming done;
> A girl, […] in a corner sat,
> And crowding-men, around her spat.
>
> 'Twas on a Southern Tramway-car,
> And she a dusky passenger
> The Chained Battalion, […] raced
> To keep her ever, in her place!
>
> And she alone, unfettered, free
> In all the mottled company

[76] In an verse letter Spencer wrote, but apparently never sent, to Hughes, she alludes to the racial and gender politics that restricted her productivity and success as a poet: "Arc after arc you see, / If any where I own / A circle it is one / Frustrate beginning— " ("Dear Langston" 10-13).

> Soared up aloft, in fancy sweet,
> While they were razing, at her feet.

As Davis explains, train travel offered black women a "new historical experience of autonomous movement" (68) that brought with it wider implications about women's self-governance in Western social structures. Not only did the railway represent a break from middle-class women's traditional confinement to the domestic sphere, it emerged as a transregional and trans-American contact zone for African American intellectuals and writers, giving them opportunities to physically converse with peers who lived far away. In a 1927 letter from Johnson to Spencer, she describes some of her literary exchanges with Alice Dunbar Nelson, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and W.E.B. Du Bois while riding a chartered car from New York to Greensboro, North Carolina (Box 4, Folder 6). In the same letter, Johnson also alludes to plans for Spencer to meet the party at a train station, illustrating that African American cultural networks associated with the railway emerged not only from persons travelling in the cars themselves but also from those that met them at the trains' stopping points. The railway also demonstrated modernity's limits in terms of annexing the legalistic and cultural geography of the Jim Crow South. In an act of civil disobedience, the train's "dusky passenger" refuses to give up her seat in the white section of a southern railway car. After crossing the Mason-Dixon line, railway companies forced black people from first-class cars into segregated coaches. Jim Crow laws on the railway, Luther Adams contends, illustrate that while the division between the North and South was more cultural than geographical, for African Americans, that boundary "was no less real" (37).

The traveling blues man had always been a major part of the blues, but during the 1920s, the travelling blues woman emerged as a new subject. In addition to depictions of autonomous sexuality, travel narratives were another primary means used by male and female classic blues artists to assert personal freedom, exemplified in such song titles such as "Travelling Blues,"

"Leaving This Morning," "Walking Blues," and "Runaway Blues." While blues songs about travel often exhibit an optimism similar to that of African American spirituals (Davis 77), they, too, express the anxieties resulting from segregation. Clara Smith, a contemporary of Bessie Smith's, recorded the "L&N Blues" in 1925, a song evocative of Johnson's poem, that "explicitly calls attention to the racist policies of the South even as it praises the travelling woman" (Davis 86):

> Mason-Dixon line is down where the South begins,
> Mason-Dixon line is down where the South begins,
> Gonna leave a Pullman and ride the L & N (7-9)

As demonstrated in Smith's lyrics, the intensely personal perspective expected of classic blues songs was by no means incompatible with social commentary or political protest. Johnson's unpublished poem about resisting racial intimidations on the railway underscores that the blues woman's literary female counterparts also recognized the politically transgressive power of railway travel and personal narratives.

The geographic, and sometimes social, mobility associated with the modern railway brings us back to the salon exchanges behind Johnson's and Spencer's literary careers. While they may not have travelled to the extent of many of their peers, their poetry is no less enriched by the "contactual inspiration" found in the cross-currents of African American modernism(s).

CHAPTER 3

Una Marson, Elizabeth Bishop, and Tourist Archipelagoes of the circumCaribbean

Among the various geospatial frameworks to have emerged in recent decades, transnational perspectives on the U.S. South have been especially useful for investigating cross-currents between literatures of North America and the Caribbean. At first glance, neither Una Marson nor Elizabeth Bishop, the focus of this chapter, might seem directly relevant to literary studies of the U.S. South: Marson was born in 1905 in Jamaica, at that time a British colony, and Bishop, born in 1911 in Massachusetts, spent her early childhood in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. Situating both poets within the borderlands of the Caribbean-southern sphere, however, we can locate important similarities in the way both poets respond to geocultural, historical, and economic issues particular to the intertropical region of the circumCaribbean during the 1930s and early 1940s.

Two notable alliances between Marson and Bishop are their close ties to tropical islands, and their periodic departures from and returns to the circumCaribbean: Marson lived approximately thirty years in Jamaica before her first move to London in 1932 and then intermittently resided in England and Jamaica over the next fourteen years; she later lived in Washington D.C. for eight years between 1952 and 1960 before returning to Kingston, Jamaica, where she stayed for the remainder of her life (Jarrett-Macauley 203). After a year-long sojourn in Europe, Bishop resided in Key West, on and off again, between 1936 and 1950, before eventually moving to Brazil in 1951, where she lived until 1967.[77] Her childhood years in Nova

[77] Bishop officially lived in Key West between 1938 and 1942, but spend time there for intermittent periods prior and subsequent to those years.

Scotia, a peninsula steeped in the maritime culture of the Canadian Atlantic, also strongly directed her poetry's nautical compass.

In addition to their mutual ties to the circumCaribbean, Marson and Bishop also lived in and wrote about the social margins. Though relatively privileged in terms of her education and middle-class background, Marson, a dark-skinned black woman and British colonial subject, was confined to second-class citizenship in Jamaica and everywhere else in the Anglophone world. She writes most explicitly about her own personal encounters with racial discrimination and colorism in her poems from the late 1930s, after having lived in London, the heart of the British Empire, for much of that decade. At a time when marriage and motherhood were intricately bound up with middle-class respectability and modern progress, Marson's early resistance to those roles put her at odds with the status quo of her gender and class and complicated her relationship to the burgeoning literary nationalism of the 1930s.[78] Likewise, Bishop was also born into financial privilege, but, in many ways, she did not adhere to societal expectations. She was essentially orphaned at an early age, as her father died and her mother was institutionalized soon thereafter; the loss of both parents in her youth, as numerous critics have stressed, likely contributed to her sense of perpetual displacement. In addition to this early monumental loss, Bishop's lesbianism was also a source of social alienation, positioning her, as well as her partnerships with women, outside heteronormative notions of gender, sexuality, and family.

In terms of historical context, broadly speaking, both were part of a later generation of modernist writers who embarked upon their professional writing careers during the global economic crisis of the 1930s, a decade often characterized as a period of so-called isolationism in the wake of World War I. For the remainder of the interwar period, each witnessed, firsthand, the

[78] In 1960 Marson did marry Peter Staples, an American dentist in Washington, D.C., but they separated less than a year after the nuptials. During the marriage, Marson's mental state had deteriorated, and she was admitted to St. Elizabeth Hospital for major depression in 1961 (Jarrett-Macauley 203-205).

continued escalation of totalitarianism, ultra-nationalism, and militarism both at home and in Europe. While many U.S. Americans had become wary of imperialist rhetoric after World War I, military and economic conflicts among Western colonial powers were largely associated in the public mind with Europe and Asia. During the 1930s, often considered the formative years of Caribbean literary nationalism, many West Indian writers began to more openly protest not only European but also U.S. imperialism in the region, including its modern actuations in the tourism industry. Nearly a century later, subsequent generations of Caribbean writers have continued to chart parallels between modern histories of totalitarianism in Eastern and Central Europe and the Soviet Union and those in America and the Caribbean. As asserted by the late Saint Lucian writer Derek Walcott in his poem "Forest of Europe" (1979), Caribbean economies are among the most formidably violent systems of global power: "The tourist archipelagoes of my South / are prisons too, corruptible" (56-57).

Recalling the intricate coastal alliances between South Carolina and Jamaica, as explored in Beatrice Ravenel's poem "The Pirates," Marson's and Bishop's work largely concerns itself with cross-island identities. If we configure the predominant migratory arcs of each poet's regional poetry during the 1930s in broadly dualistic terms—Marson's movements between Jamaica and England, and Bishop's traversals between Nova Scotia and Key West—we can identify a preliminary "double space," or "double identity," through which colonial power structures are critiqued and hybrid identities are explored. From these doubled and bifurcated spaces emerges a more fluid, porous borderland—what Homi Bhabha might call a "third space"—where national, geographical, racial, and gendered perspectives converge in a discursive atlas. In Marson's three volumes of poetry published in the 1930s, titled *Tropic Reveries* (1930), *Heights and Depths* (1931), and *The Moth and Star* (1937), she repeatedly oscillates between the

island of Great Britain and the British colony of Jamaica as she grapples with the "paradoxes of colonial mimicry" (Emery 123). Within Marson's narratives of double-consciousness as a black colonial subject and Jamaican nationalist, she interpolates a Global South encompassing a web of British and American Empires, Black diasporas, and the Caribbean archipelago.

Similarly, Bishop's first published volume, *North & South* (1946), a collection of poems mostly written in the 1930s and early 1940s while she was living in Key West (Millier 179), is loosely divided into two geographically themed halves; though some poems feature sceneries from Europe and Massachusetts, the volume's two halves are overwhelmingly inflected by the Nova Scotian and Floridian peninsulas, respectively. An expression of Bishop's migratory consciousness, the physical, aesthetic, and emotional geographies of *North & South*'s Canadian and Floridian sections intermittently spill over into one another, creating a cross-peninsular diaspora of spatialized memories. The Florida poems, many of which focus on the circum-Caribbean milieu particular to Key West—an island closer to Havana than to Miami—reveal a third site circuitously shaped by the Caribbean, North American continent, and U.S. southern region.

Writing from the social and geographical border zones of Caribbean-southern space, Marson and Bishop refract traditional paradigms of the nation-state through the prisms of race, gender, and class, providing insight into the complexities of nationhood as it is imagined and experienced from *below*. Their poetry charts a labyrinth of transnational and transcolonial links across empires and territories, highlighting how nations are formed, *re*formed, and spliced by global economies, human migration, and geographic myths. As residents of popular travel destinations in the Caribbean basin, both poets were privy to the realities of economic exploitation and racial oppression erased from popular touristic narratives of island utopias,

narratives rooted in Eurocentric mythologies and ideologies of islands as suspended in time—and, by extension, outside the encroachments of modernity. In response to touristic representations of Caribbean islands and significantly shaped by the global economic crisis of the 1930s, their bodies of work conjoin to a broader economy and dislodge myths of insularity associated with the Romantic tradition of the picturesque, from which the visual culture of the modern tourist industry derives. Furthermore, their work critiques American attempts to establish empire through economic, political, military, and cultural occupations in the Caribbean, thus dispelling the standard characterization of the United States during the interwar period as isolationist, or non-interventionist (a sweeping generalization based on American neutrality legislation in the 1930s). Using similar linguistic and dialogic strategies, their poetry illuminates blind spots in the Western tourist gaze shaped by racialized and gendered notions of geography.

Marson wore numerous professional hats throughout her life, and her accomplishments were considerable: she was a poet, dramatist, journalist, radio broadcaster, publisher, editor, social worker, and activist. Before her first move to London in 1932, she had already published two volumes of poetry, *Tropic Reveries* in 1930 and *Heights and Depths* in 1931, and produced her play "At What Price?" in 1932 at Kingston's War Theatre (Jarrett-Macauley 163). She was also Jamaica's first female publisher and editor of a magazine, establishing a monthly periodical called *The Cosmopolitan*, which ran from 1928 until 1931. The magazine reported on social issues and cultural topics specific to middle-class and aspiring middle-class women in Jamaica (30). Determined in those early years to show the world that Jamaica's black literati possessed the same talents and middle-class values as those of elite Anglophone cosmopolitans, Marson used the magazine to publish the work of local Jamaican writers, for whom there were virtually no opportunities, locally or abroad, for publication (33). In London, her political and aesthetic

outlooks were deeply influenced by her experience as a black colonial subject in London and by her extensive international work with numerous pan-African and feminist political organizations. In 1937, she published her third and most well-received volume of poetry, *The Moth and Star*. Corresponding with the transnational elements of her poetry, her career in radio broadcasting connected West Indians across the globe. She worked for the BBC from 1938 until 1946, the most widely lauded accomplishment of her career being her installment of *Caribbean Voices* in 1943, a program devoted to broadcasting the work of Caribbean writers; she was involved with that radio program until 1945, when she left England for good to recover in Jamaica from deteriorated mental health that had rapidly worsened during her last year in London (Jarrett-Macauley 157-176).

Although Marson found beauty and respite in the Jamaican countryside, a major concern throughout her work relates to commercial narratives that simultaneously romanticized and revamped mythic images of the island's tropical environment for capital gain. In the late nineteenth century, British and American authorities began promoting what they called a "New Jamaica" (Thompson 29) that was catching up with rapidly modernizing parts of the world; the two major aims of this image campaign were to promote the region's burgeoning tourism and fruit trade industries.[79] This entailed reinventing "a more desirable touristic image of the island's landscape" (29) that seemed inhabitable, prosperous, and industrialized—a land on the mend from a postplantation economic depression. At the same time, images of Jamaica disseminated through the lens of the imperial tourist gaze reinforced picturesque images of the island dating back to eighteenth-century pastoral poetry, travel writings, and paintings, in which the West Indian landscape connoted temporal suspension, Western escapism, and unmitigated

[79] The Tourist Trade Development Board ran from 1922-1955, the first government-mandated marketing group in Jamaica (Taylor 139).

consumption. Picturesque representations of Jamaica that were now part of the modern tourism industry's promotional campaigns resonates with the language of what John Wharton Lowe calls the "tropical sublime," a mode of "seeing, notating, and meditating" that he observes in historical narratives and travel writings about the "subjects and landscapes of the circumCaribbean tropical zone," exotic elements which are perceived by the viewer as ineffable and mysterious (33). In keeping with the Romantic picturesque and tropical sublime, Jamaica was frequently presented as a "fairy-tale landscape" (Thompson 44) or awe-inspiring "dreamland" (50) existing outside of time. At the turn of the twentieth century, British and American business industries tried to synthesize contradictory representations of Jamaica as a "Garden of Eden" suspended in time and a successful enterprise in modern industry. The fusion of these two conflicting images of the island—prelapsarian yet also modern—was at the center of a booming Caribbean tourist economy. In Marson's lyrical tributes to Jamaica's pastoral landscape, she repeatedly pulls these melded representations of the island apart in an ongoing effort to reveal the artificiality of touristic narratives and illuminate the commercial interests they serve.

The United States asserted its increasing economic and political power through the "monolithic business model" (Wilkes 129) of the United Fruit Company, which, by 1938, was the largest owner of landholdings in Jamaica (Wilkes 131). While imperial authorities went to extremes to make the environment hospitable for tourists and members of Jamaica's white elite and growing white middle class, they systematically excluded the island's native black population from the conveniences and economic opportunities afforded by modernization. The United Fruit Company was depicted by promoters as "a benign and almost egalitarian representation of the capitalist agribusiness" (Wilkes 139). For example, American and British lecturers took prospective tourists on a virtual voyage to the island by presenting slides of

photographs, which were sometimes cropped so as to omit the subjects' impoverished surroundings (Thompson 275).

Marson's portrayal of Jamaican subjects, that is, people and landscapes traditionally rendered by Europeans in the modes of the picturesque and tropical sublime, in her poetry from the 1930s warrants a closer look. The bulk of Marson scholarship has focused primarily on the works of poetry and drama she produced during and after her residence in London, namely her third volume, *The Moth and Star*, published in 1937, and her play, *Pocomania*, first produced in 1938. Marson's poetry and drama from the late 1930s present a more openly cynical view of the British Empire and underscore the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on her work. Unlike her incorporation of overtly experimental forms and blues poems in *The Moth and Star*, she predominantly uses traditional lyric forms in her first two poetry volumes, *Tropic Reveries*, published in 1930, and *Heights and Depths*, published one year later in 1931. While several scholars have demonstrated her early poetry's self-reflexive, if at times ambivalent, attitude toward colonial mimicry of Romantic forms, her early poetry's critical appraisal of the transnational dimensions of modern British-American Empire has remained unexamined. Through subtle manipulation of traditional lyric forms, her anticolonial narratives challenge colonial Edenic representations of Jamaica's ethno/bioscape. A crucial, yet neglected, component of Marson's early anticolonial strategies are retroactive meanings created through dialogic relationships between individual poems. These retroactive readings operate similarly to the "'double-take' strategy" Denise deCaires Narain identifies in Marson's most frequently examined poems, such as "Little Brown Girl" from her third volume, *The Moth and Star*, in which her use of alternating perspectives impugn prejudicial stereotypes held by British whites about blacks in the West Indies.

Marson's three early "Jamaica" poems, from her first two poetry volumes, exemplify how these retroactive readings subvert British and American destination narratives of the Caribbean. In Marson's four-stanza poem entitled "Jamaica," from her first volume, *Tropic Reveries*, the transition from pastoral to antipastoral narrative essentially hinges on the reader's consideration of the sequential arrangement of poems. "The Singing Pilgrim," the poem that immediately follows "Jamaica," generates an antipastoral narrative both within its own textual boundaries and retroactively beyond, into the pastoral narrative preceding it. Without this dialogic relationship, the antipastoral narrative in "Jamaica" remains occluded by what Alison Donnell calls its imitative "'picture postcard' vocabulary" (56) that ultimately "returns the island to an Anglocentric gaze" (56). Read as a self-contained work, the poem indeed redeploys colonially derived images propagated by the tourism industry. The first stanza's lauding of the island's warm tropical climate, "one grand summer all the long year through" (9) reinforces promotional depictions of the island as a "summerland" health resort for American and British tourists during the winter season. In the second stanza, Marson presents a West Indian landscape engulfed in a polyphony of bucolic sounds and images:

> Among thy woods the birds with carols gay
> From morn till night are merrily at play;
> The hum of bees upon the flowering trees
> Makes sweetest music with the summer breeze.
> The fields are covered o'er with Daisies bright
> Which nod their pretty heads in sheer delight;
> By babbling brooks the shady pals arise,
> While wandering near, earth seems a Paradise. (11-18)

The leisurely act of "wandering" designates the tourist's privileged channel of mobility, while the qualifier "near" hints at the imperceptible sociospatial separation between white sojourners and the island's black native voices drowned out by the swarming aural veneer of "birds with carols gay," the "hum of bees," the "sweetest music" of "the summer breeze," and "babbling

brooks." As intimated by the poem's Edenic mise en scène, for tourists visiting the island's resorts at a proximate yet securely detached position from the facts of (black) tropic existence, "earth seems a Paradise" (18).

While the first half of the poem appears to uphold conventional idyllic depictions of the West Indies, the second half subtly hints toward a countermap of the island's human geography that diverges from traditional Anglo-European conceptions of New World paradise rooted in the Romantic tradition. In the poem's third stanza, nightfall eclipses the scenic view of an ebullient summerland, concluding, in the final stanza, with an invitation to partake of the island's seemingly infinite, all-providing resources:

> The brilliance of the myriad stars by night
> Unto the weary traveller giveth light;
> Among thy woods the flitting fireflies
> Form one grand starland with their fiery eyes.
> And when Diana rising o'er yon hill
> Sheds her pale light, while all the earth is still,
> Ah, then, what bliss to wander hand in hand
> Like lovers 'neath the bowers in Fairyland. (19-26)

> All hail to thee! Fair Island of the West,
> Where thy dear people are forever blest
> With beauteous gifts from nature's blessed hand,
> Lavished in rich profusion o'er the land.
> Welcome be all who journey many a mile
> To share the joys of this our lovely Isle:
> Fond nature still invites, -- 'Come, be my guest
> And I will give thee gladness, peace and rest!" (27-34)

At the onset of nightfall, the diurnal tableau of "one grand summer" is intercepted by "one grand starland," a celestial chart configured by fireflies. An entomological trope in British literary depictions of the English landscape, fireflies also frequently appear in Romantic poetry about the whimsical enchantments of the West Indies; in the same Romantic tradition, poets also at times envisage parallels between fireflies and fugitive slaves in the Caribbean, as exemplified in

Charlotte Smith's "To the Firefly of Jamaica, Seen in a Collection," (1804) in which Smith compares a runaway slave to a bewildered insect specimen. As Karen Sands-O'Connor has argued, Smith's poem, along with other West Indian-themed works of Romantic literature, dehumanizes enslaved Africans by portraying them as mute, irrational subjects who are too easily frightened to be able to navigate through forested nature (Sands-O'Connor 32-33). In contrast, Marson's poem incorporates fireflies as a revisionary trope—*re*-visionary both in terms of giving old symbols new meaning and deciphering subtextual perspectives by way of taking a second look—that alludes to historical African fugitives and modern black subjects who remain outside the awareness of white colonialists and tourists. The intertextual correspondence between "Jamaica" and "The Singing Pilgrim" aside, the poem alludes to an embodied, geographically literate subjectivity beyond the surveillance of white colonialists and tourists; the celestial map configured by the anthropomorphizing effects of the fireflies' "fiery eyes" suggests the presence of a subaltern and cognizant relationship to the landscape.

Marson's deconstructed tourist gaze in "The Singing Pilgrim" works to further elucidate this black countermap of mobility by recircuiting the normative touristic models of leisure portrayed in "Jamaica" through the disruptive forces of nocturnal and racial darkness. Shifting from the utopian panoramic view of "Jamaica," "The Singing Pilgrim" is narrated through the voyeuristic gaze of a white tourist, who observes a black market woman from inside a resting automobile. Exemplifying one of the modernist hallmarks of Marson's work, the poem showcases her protean adoptions of various racial, socioeconomic, and (a)gendered personas, as well as her incorporation of motor cars as key symbols of white hegemonic modernity:

> I was sitting by the wayside
> Restive in the waiting car,
> For I longed to hasten homewards,
> I had journeyed from afar. (1-4)

As seen in other poems by Marson that depict socioeconomic inequalities imparted on black female laborers, the automobile epitomizes the white speaker's economic privilege.[80] In a later poem, "The Stone-Breakers," from *The Moth and Star*, Marson depicts the indifference of wealthy whites, who travel the island by automobile, to the grueling work conditions of the black Jamaican women who hammer large rocks into gravel to be used in the building of new roads.[81] In "The Singing Pilgrim," the speaker's privileged mode of transportation and the indication that he or she has travelled "from afar" indicate the event is relayed from the perspective of a tourist.

Echoing the use of fireflies in the preceding poem "Jamaica," the appearance of glowing insects in the second stanza interrupts the Anglocentric narrative of tropical space:

> Dark the sky o'erhead and cloudy,
> And the night wind whispered low,
> Naught relieved the inky blackness
> But the silent flitting glow
>
> Of the ever restless fireflies,
> Dancing madly here and there,
> As I sat amid the silence
> That to me seemed everywhere. (5-12)

The speaker's anxiety, suggested by the desire for darkness to be "relieved," stems from nightfall's temporary negation, by way of its pervasive "inky blackness" and "silence," of a known and controllable landscape. Reinforced by the physical enclosure of the automobile, the speaker's anxious response to being enveloped by darkness anticipates the inward self-scrutiny that follows the speaker's outward surveillance:

> Suddenly a short slim figure

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[80] As Lee Jenkins notes of a moving car in Marson's poem, "The Stone Breakers," from her third volume, *The Moth and Star*, the automobile typifies "black poverty verses the white affluence" (137) in Jamaica.

[81] Marson's U.S. contemporary Zora Neale Hurston also wrote about Jamaican women stone breakers in her 1938 anthropological travelogue, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Jamaica and Haiti*. In her description of the women's brutal work conditions, Hurston notes, "The government buys the crushed rock to use in road-building and maintenance. It is said that a woman who sticks to her business with the help of a child or two can average about one dollar and a half per week" (59).

Stepped into the path of light
Streaming from the silent motor,
And I wondered at the sight.

'Twas the figure of a woman
Going down the hill of life –
Her brown face was worn and wrinkled
By life's strenuous toil and strife.

On her head she bore a basket
Balanced there composedly,
Silently her bare feet moving
While her empty hands swung free. (25-36)

In addition to the market woman's exhausted countenance, "worn and wrinkled / By life's strenuous toil and strife," the hymn she sings to herself, "Must I Go, And Empty Handed?" ironically counters prevailing touristic depictions of the island's black natives as "enviable inhabitants of paradise" (Thompson 75), who were able to "simply live off the fruits of the land that proliferated in the Garden of Eden" (75). In like manner, the speaker's observation of the market woman retroactively challenges the previous poem's conception of Jamaica as a place "Where thy dear people are forever blest / With beauteous gifts from nature's blessed hand."

Eagerly I gazed upon her,
That lone traveller of the night,
And it seemed but one brief second
Ere she vanished from my sight. (29-40)

By closely positioning the speaker in relation to the observed Jamaican subject, Marson challenges the narrative position of physical remoteness in American and European travel writings, which are usually characterized by "the practice of observing from a distance" (Wilkes 140). After being momentarily confronted with the undeniable hardships of the market woman's life, the speaker is forced to question the paradox of invisibility and hypervisibility at the heart of the tourism industry: white travelers' experiences of the island are overwhelmingly shaped by

preconceived notions of non-whites in the Caribbean, thereby blinding them to the real-life abuses and disadvantages entailed upon black and brown-skinned people on the island.

> Then I went along the highway
> Hearing still the sweet refrain,
> And throughout my life's long journey
> It shall in my heart remain.

Confronted with a less filtered view—though still from the vantage point of privilege, as the speaker remains inside the car—of the everyday hardships the market woman must endure in order to survive, the speaker pledges "to help some weary wanderer / Reach that better land above" (65-68). The speaker's conclusion that "Just a word, a thought, an action / May cause untold good or ill" (81-82) morally implicates the ostensibly irreproachable role of white tourists in Jamaica's postplantation economy.

Through the market woman, Marson retroactively exposes the invisible black subjectivity in "Jamaica." On one hand, the striking similarities between the language ascribed to Jamaica's black female peasant and that ascribed to the white tourist juxtaposes the island's travels of leisure with the pilgrimages of survival in the previous poem, ironizing the concluding lines in "Jamaica," "Welcome be all who journey many a mile" and "gladness, peace and rest." On the other hand, the linguistic resonances between the "weary traveller" in "Jamaica" and the "lone traveller of the night" and "weary wanderer" in "The Singing Pilgrim" gesture toward concealed black mobilities etched in the margins of each poem's narrative geography. The language used to describe the market woman in "The Singing Pilgrim" prompts the reader to re-read and reinterpret the diction and point of view ostensibly ascribed to white tourists in "Jamaica." The similar wording used in the two poems imbues the "weary traveller" in "Jamaica" with new connotations of racial and colonial disenfranchisement.

Comparable to the idyllic paintings of Gullah-Geechee female market vendors created by white artists associated with the Charleston Renaissance, the black market woman became the "most photographed icon" (Thompson 114) in early twentieth-century postcard images of the Caribbean. Meanwhile, in black metropoles in the U.S. Southeast, female blues artists like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith and Harlem Renaissance poets like Anne Spencer and Langston Hughes—a literary correspondent and friend of Marson's—were refashioning traditional depictions of black working-class female subjects. In another of Marson's poems about female working-class Jamaicans, titled "Going to Market," from Marson's third volume, *The Moth and Star* (1937), Marson more pointedly challenges racial and gendered depictions of black labor widely circulated in picture postcards of black market women. During the 1920s and 1930s, Marson was captivated by female blues artists, particularly Bessie Smith (Jarrett-Macauley 123), as well as the literary movement of the Harlem Renaissance. African American writer and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson, a mentor to countless associates of the New Negro Movement and Harlem Renaissance, was a significant conduit between Marson and the African American literary scene during the late 1930s (Jarret-Macauley 83, 120).[82] The two writers' mutual sense of affinity must have been due in large part to Johnson's own personal ties to, and interest in, the Caribbean.[83] As others have discussed, the Jamaican dialect and blues poems from

[82] Marson and Weldon Johnson began an epistolary friendship in 1936, when Marson contacted him after hearing him read his poetry on the BBC (Jarrett-Macauley 83). Although Marson never met Weldon Johnson in person, over time she came to know him as a "'dear unknown friend'" (83). During the late 1930s, he provided feedback on her writing, gave her publishing advice, and updated her on the latest developments in U.S. black literary circles (83, 120). In addition to the influence of Weldon Johnson's poetic experiments with African American oral traditions on Marson's dialect and blues poems in *The Moth and Star*, his roman a clef *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) inspired her to write an autobiographical account of her experiences as a black colonial subject. She had planned to title the autobiography *Autobiography of a Brown Girl*, an obvious homage to her African American mentor. Unfortunately, the autobiography was never published and only a few fragmented drafts remain among her papers (81-82).

[83] Johnson, who grew up in the state of Florida, had significant ancestral ties to the Caribbean on both his mother's and father's sides of the family, with especially strong connections to Haiti, the Bahamas, Nassau, and Cuba (Cartwright 68-75 and Lowe 117-119). Like Marson, Johnson often noted parallels between practices of racial oppression in the Caribbean and those in the U.S. South. Among the most heinous examples Johnson observed of

The Moth and Star reflect the global rippling effect of intersecting black musical and literary movements in the United States.[84] Her poems about Jamaican market women, including those written in both traditional and experimental forms, resonate with the Afro-feminist subject matter in works by many of her African American contemporaries.

As a visual emblem of the West Indies in tourism-oriented photographs, "the market woman and nature are connected, if not equated" (Thompson 103). Through carefully staged studio environments and alterations made in the postdevelopment process, photographs of market women in the West Indies were strategically erased of visual signs of modernization; these omissions reinforced outside perceptions of the island as an exotic locale outside of time (115). In "Going to Market," a poem about the hardships endured by an elderly female laborer, Marson emphasizes Jamaica's "modernized" environment in which plantation agriculture and highway infrastructure visibly intersect. This hybrid landscape emphasizes that Jamaica is not sequestered from technological advancements linked with the fast pace of modernity; despite the association of automobiles with "progress," such infrastructure is implemented in a way that reinforces the enormous economic disparity between Jamaica's wealthy elite and its working poor. Although Jamaica's roadways were largely built by black female laborers, the benefits and opportunities afforded by automobile transportation, and Jamaica's agricultural and tourist economies, were not extended to them; in many cases, Jamaica's new transportation system made the living conditions of the island's rural female peasantry even more difficult, since many market women now had to travel great distances from rural parishes to Kingston down the burning-hot gravel roads without shoes.

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oppressive racial practices in the Caribbean similar to the U.S. South was the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 (Lowe 119).

[84] For discussions of Marson's blues and dialect poetry, see Lee M. Jenkins's *The Language of Caribbean Poetry: Boundaries of Expression* (126-174), Denise deCaires Narain's *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry*: *Making Style* (24-29), and Delia Jarrett-Macauley's *The Life of Una Marson 1905-65* (84-85 and 122-124).

Old lady
You dig in the fields
All day long,
Are you not weary
Does your head not ache? (1-5)

Are you not afraid
To travel so far
On the long hot
And dreary roads? (15-18)

Old lady, I love you
For the courage you bring
To life – for your goodness
Of heart and your hope
Of a heaven
Where there are no hot fields
And hotter highways –
Where the streets
Are paved with gold,
And even the Great God Himself
Will wipe all tears
From your eyes. (37-48)

The poem is strikingly reminiscent of Spencer's homage to an elderly Lynchburg domestic worker in "Lady, Lady," a poem that appeared in the March 1925 installment of *Survey Graphic*, titled "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro"—a publication Marson doubtlessly read, given that the work of her Jamaican colleague Claude McKay was represented in that issue.[85] Like Spencer's poem, which underscores working-class black women's political invisibility and highlights the masculinist biases of southern Garveyism in the U.S., Marson's "lady" registers the erasure of black women during Jamaica's early labor and nationalist movements of the 1930s.

[85] To my knowledge, there is no evidence, at least among Spencer's archived letters, notebooks, and diaries, that Spencer ever met or corresponded with Marson. However, similarities in diction and subject matter between the two poems, particularly their endings, suggest to me that Marson was familiar with and admired Spencer's published work. The final lines of "Lady, Lady" are as follows: "Lady, Lady, I saw your heart, / And altered there in its darksome place / Were the tongues of flames the ancients knew, / Where the good God sits to spangle through."

Compared to Marson's first poetry volume, *Tropic Reveries*, her second published book, *Heights and Depths* (1931), demonstrates more overt criticisms of Jamaica's modern touristic images, as seen in her two other "Jamaica" poems, titled "Jamaica" and "In Jamaica." Although their social commentary is more pronounced than that of Marson's first "Jamaica" poem, "Jamaica" and "In Jamaica" present an intertextual dialogue that creates an uneasy exchange between the privileged gaze of white tourists and the suppressed perspective of the island's native black population. In the poem, "Jamaica," located toward the beginning of *Heights and Depths*, Marson uses an acrostic form to simulate the interface between artificial commercial images and white tourists-consumers. Traditionally used as a mnemonic device, Marson's acrostic engrains associations in the reader's memory between a conspicuously encoded word and a series of truisms. Marson's use of hyperbolic diction accentuates the acrostic's contrived formal and thematic arrangement, its list of stock artificial images insinuating that the modern tourist gaze is predetermined by rote consumption of commercial narratives. The boldfaced first letters of the poem's seven lines, ordered so as to vertically spell out "**JAMAICA**," are suggestive of tourism advertisements, which align the destination image with pithy slogans and pictures that implicitly claim to distill the essence of tropical paradise:

> **J**ust a lovely little jewel floating on fair Carib's breast,
> **A**ll a-glittering in her verdue [sic] 'neath a blazing tropic sky.
> **M**ust have been part of Eden, it's so full of peace and rest,
> **A**nd the flowers in their splendor make you feel it's good to die
> **I**n a spot that's so near heaven where one never feels depressed,
> **'C**ause Dame Nature makes you lazy and Dame Fortune lingers nigh,
> **A**nd you feel just like a fledgling in your mother's cozy nest.

Underscoring the artificiality of touristic narratives, the acrostic's shallow representation of the island ironically falls short of the profundity heralded by the collection title, *Heights and Depths*. The poem's opening description of Jamaica as an unassuming "little jewel" free-floating on the

sea echoes advertising slogans lauding the island as a place of unregulated consumption. Along with other American and British steamship lines, the United Fruit Company frequently advertised Jamaica as "the gem of the tropics." The comparison of Jamaica to a "gem" or "jewel" had been prominent in European accounts of Jamaica's "discovery" and domestication since the eighteenth century. Marson's appropriation of this centuries-old colonial discourse, combined with the comparison of Jamaica to the Garden of Eden suggests that the desire to recreate earthly paradise remains a constant in the way colonial aspirations are imagined and enacted. The line "Dame Nature makes you lazy" directly evokes representations of black labor in lectures, literature, and images of the island that "described the natives' ability to simply live off the fruits of the land that proliferated in the Garden of Eden" (Thompson 75).

While the acrostic suggests that racialized stereotypes of non-whites and Edenic mythologies of tropical abundance continue to proliferate in modern travel discourse, it also registers ongoing conflicts and negotiations between colonial geographies of disease and commerce.[86] The poem's seemingly paradoxical associations between Jamaica, health, and death underscore the historical relationship between medical topography, "the mapping of disease landscapes" (Bewell 32), and how space is perceived (and marketed) in the British Empire. By the late eighteenth century, "medical topography became integral to medical practice, not only through the identification of pathogenic places, but also the commercial marketing of 'health spots'" (32). The speaker's assertion that Jamaica offers "peace and rest" and is a place "where one never feels depressed" points to Jamaica's modern medical geography as a health resort for white Europeans and Americans to recover from illnesses or "temporarily escape" (Wilkes 132)

[86] As Leah Rosenberg observes in Marson's short story "Sojourn," published in *The Cosmopolitan* in 1931, Jamaica is described "in terms lifted from tourist guidebooks" (Rosenberg, "Modern Romances" 176) which counter eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British narratives of the Caribbean "as a place of moral corruption and death" (176).

the stress of high-pressure jobs. More importantly, Marson's contradictory characterization of Jamaica as a place where it is "good to die" underscores the mutability of historical and modern representations of colonial spaces; alternately portrayed as a disease landscape and a health resort, Jamaica's biogeography, Marson suggests, is largely a social construction.

The acrostic's corresponding poem, titled "In Jamaica," presents a series of stark juxtapositions between colonial paradisal myths surrounding the island and the harsh realities of its racial caste system. As suggested by the prepositional addendum in the title, "*In* Jamaica," the poem reveals these inconsistencies from the perspective of a black native who inhabits the harsh realities cropped out of the acrostic poem's "picture-postcard vocabulary." Each stanza begins with a pastoral exaltation that initially corroborates the Edenic mythology represented in the acrostic; read in its entirety, however, each stanza self-reflexively challenges its opening exaltation, drawing attention to blind spots in the collective tourist gaze. The poem's first stanza responds to inconsistent images of Jamaica's black labor circulated by British colonial and American business authorities, whose competition for "picturesque authorship" (Thompson 85) of the island had rapidly escalated since the late nineteenth century:

> It's a lazy life that we live here
> Tho' we carry a fair share of work;
> And tho' the warmth makes us weary,
> It's seldom we really do shirk. (5-8)

Here, the speaker presents incompatible images of Jamaican peasants: shiftless and lethargic, yet paradoxically undertaking their "fair share of work." By presenting two different characterizations of black laborers that cannot logically coexist, Marson implicates the falsity of Euro-American accounts of what life in Jamaica is really like for its black population. Praising Jamaica as a safe vacation destination, tourism boosters in England claimed that, as a direct result of British colonialism, Jamaican black peasants were scrupulously clean, remarkably

hardworking, and steadfastly loyal to the British empire (Thompson 71). American fruit companies, on the other hand, more often depicted Jamaican black peasants as lazy in order to justify the importation of indentured Indian laborers, which allowed the American corporate sector to control wages (79-80).[87] The poem's inconsistent representations of Jamaica's working poor draw attention to competing imperial authorships, debunking commercial representations of black laborers by revealing them as stereotypes.

The poem moves from Jamaica's rural areas to the racial and class stratifications in Kingston. While picturesque depictions of Jamaica's tropical wilderness had traditionally been the primary source of fascination for adventurers and entrepreneurs in previous centuries, by the late nineteenth century, the city of Kingston became the most popular destination for tourists. Its hotels, owned and operated by Americans, abounded in promotional images of the island (Thompson 213). For the majority of Jamaica's black population, however, Kingston still symbolized the old "aristocracy of skin" (217), in which persons who were obviously non-white, particularly dark-skinned black people, were excluded from the social circles and career opportunities enclosed within the city's resort hotels. Whereas Jamaica's white mercantile classes gained new economic and social prominence in the island's burgeoning cosmopolitan center (Thompson 217), members of the black population in West Kingston were "the people whom Jamaica's economy had failed most acutely" (Rosenberg, *Nationalism* 165).

> O! It's a glorious life in Jamaica
> For the man who has merely enough,
> But it's a dreary life for the beggars,
> And the large slums are all pretty rough.
> It's a gay life too for the children
> Not poor, and whose skin is light,
> But the darker set are striving

[87] Tourism boosters appropriated this narrative from British plantation owners, who introduced it in the 1840s in order to justify the importation of indentured Indians, which allowed them to control labor wages (Thompson 76-79).

And facing a very stiff fight. (17-24)

Just prior to the Jamaican Exposition of 1891, in editorials in Jamaica's newspaper, the *Daily Gleaner*, Kingston's run-down houses, garbage-littered streets, and inadequate sewage system were decried as "blots upon this fair and goodly country" (qtd. in Thompson 87). "The vaunted image of the contented Jamaican masses was," as Taylor notes, "undermined by the frequency of begging" (118). During the early twentieth century, serious efforts were made to rid Kingston's streets of beggars, and the local government went after poor blacks who offered their services as tour guides or sold souvenirs to tourists by instituting licensing laws that kept the tourism business in the hands of British and American stakeholders (118-119).

The fourth stanza illuminates an additional contrast between the island's impoverished black population and white tourists:

> O, it's a wonderful life in Jamaica
> For the tourists who visit this shore,
> There's golf, there's dancing, and swimming,
> And charms that they ne'er saw before.
> They call it a garden of Eden,
> They love the fair hills of St Ann,
> And they say on the white sands of Mo. Bay
> They get such a wonderful tan! (25-32)

The references to golf courses, dance halls, and swimming pools illustrate the luxuries of leisure that Jamaica's tourism boosters emphasized to illustrate that the island had finally caught up with modernity. The phrases "fair hills" and "white sands" used to describe the landscape of two popular tourist destinations carry a racial undertone that evokes the various discrimination practices that were implemented to prohibit non-whites from entering these popular tourist destinations and interacting with tourists.[88] Unlike the assertion of Edenic mythology made by

[88] The White Sands Beach of Montego Bay had previously been a public beach, but after it was privatized in 1929, it enforced de facto segregation by way of high entry fees and classist behavioral laws (Taylor 148-152). While the new lease stipulated that public visitors could not be turned away on the basis of color, they instituted decency laws

the acrostic's "native" speaker, here, the comparison of Jamaica to a Garden of Eden is clearly attributed to an external colonial perspective through the use of the third-person pronoun in "*They* call it a garden of Eden." Here, Marson undermines that colonialist point of view through subtle illuminations of blind spots in the tourist gaze.

Marson's poem, "Heartbreak Cottages," from her third volume, *The Moth and Star* (1937), responds to portrayals of the domestic quarters of black rural laborers relayed from the privileged distance characteristic of American and European travel discourse. Travel literature at the turn of the century downplayed the visible magnitude of desperate poverty on the island by suggesting that "nature was so bountiful, housing was less necessity than luxury" (Taylor 107). Upon seeing the stark contrast between a seemingly lush, overabundant natural environment and extreme poverty, many tourists drew the conclusion that the island's destitute inhabitants lived in squalor by choice (Thompson 117). With the launch of the "New Jamaica" campaign, tourism boosters went to great efforts to eradicate the destitute conditions in which so many black Jamaicans lived in the island's rural and urban areas. In the poem's opening two stanzas, Marson alludes to the erasure and romanticization of poverty as part of traditional Euro-American accounts of idyllic nature in the tropics:

> Here on the fringe of our fair Southern Coast,
> In an isle of whose beauty multitudes boast
> Is scenery divine that is ne'er told in rhyme
> And a glory effaced not by time.
>
> But Nature's exquisite landscape has blots;
> On the peasant's miniature housing plots
> Are heartbreak cottages never designed
> Where workers rest from a day's hard grind. (1-8)

---

and charged members of the public to use the beach, thus eliminating the black peasant population by way of class discrimination (Taylor 148-152).

As a term closely tied to picturesque landscape paintings and to painted backgrounds on a theater stage, the word "scenery" connotes an artificial nature. The speaker's assertion that Jamaica's renowned natural splendor "is ne'er told in rhyme," on a surface level, asserts that poets cannot convey the splendor of the island's natural beauty; however, the line also implies a subtextual irony aimed at the long tradition of erasing poverty from literary accounts of the environment. Accentuating the irony of the speaker's comment on the absence of "scenery divine" in the white Western literary tradition, the description of the hovels as "never designed" underscores that picturesque landscapes are socially constructed. The peasants' dismal living conditions present a disruptive "blot" on an otherwise colonially derived vision of nature.

Marson's "At the Prison Gates," from her third volume *The Moth and Star*, illustrates the desperate hunger in Jamaica during the Great Depression, which led to the British West Indian labor unrest of 1934-1939. During the 1930s, lawmakers implemented government assistance for white entrepreneurs in Jamaica that were similar to New Deal policies in the U.S. for small businesses; however, those same assistance programs "foreboded a continuation of the old deal for black Jamaicans" (Taylor 147), since black and brown-skinned people were excluded from the workforce in the island's tourist economy, except for the most menial jobs.[89] As the living conditions of Jamaica's black population became more desperate, workers strikes and political protests against colonial rule "became louder and increasingly difficult to manage" (Donnell and Welsh 107). The poem depicts an incident that took place in 1936, in which approximately two-hundred unemployed Jamaican workers marched to the Kingston Penitentiary and pleaded to be taken in so that they might receive food and lodging.[90] Marson's portrayal of the prison

[89] Hotel proprietors were able to import building materials duty-free, and the government gave free grants to white entrepreneurs wishing to build or expand hotels (Taylor 146).

[90] The marchers exclaimed that there was no employment available to them, leaving them without any means of paying their landlords or supporting their families. Several other hunger marches occurred elsewhere in Jamaica that

director's failure to alleviate the crowd's hunger stresses the mounting crisis resulting from exploitative business practices. Through anaphoric language, Marson ironizes colonial and imperial authorities' privileged gaze upon Jamaica's starving, displaced population:

> And he the director spake unto them
> Words that could not comfort,
> Words that could not feed,
> Words that could not give hope,
> Yet they were kind words;
> And the sorrowful army
> Of Kingston's unemployed marched on –
> On with their empty stomachs,
> Their empty pockets,
> With no hope in their hearts,
> With no comfort in their souls. (13-23)

Underscored by anaphoric repetition, the Shakespearean allusion to Hamlet's reply of "Words, words, words" to Polonius—a disingenuous babbler—implicates the colonial authorities' meaningless promises to provide relief for the hungry.

Marson criticizes the extreme disparity between superfluous wealth and the emaciated condition of the island's black majority. Through the poem's overarching allusion to the Tower of Babel, Marson reflects the ineffectual and self-preserving responses of colonial and corporate landholders to the increasing hunger marches and riots in Jamaica.[91]

> And I looked,
> And behold I saw numerous men,
> Wealthy, overfed, over-indulged –
> And when they heard this
> Their hearts smote them
> And some of these men said,
> "Are not these men our brothers?"
> And others said – "Indeed they are not –

---

year; in one of those instances, marchers expressed dissatisfaction with offers from church parochial boards to provide lunch, urging that the board instead find them work (Post 243).

[91] With regard to the extended allusion to the Tower of Babel, the poem's Biblical diction resonates most strongly with this particular verse from Genesis: "And they said, Go to, *let us build us a city and a tower*, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis, 11:4).

They are worthless creatures who will not work."
And one said, "But in other lands,
There are unemployment funds."
And some said, "Let us arise
And pool ten thousand pounds,
And let us give these men land
And money to assist them."
And another said – "Nay, let us build us
Great factories and use our raw materials
So we can provide work for them,
For they are men." (24-42)

After a lengthy conversation about the prison incident over drinks, the affluent constituents walk "away happy for they pledged no wealth" (46). The dizzying interjections regarding what to do about the island's desperate poverty suggests an impending self-implosion resulting from unhampered greed—a societal shift that can be likened to the parallels Edoaurd Glissant draws between vertigo in its traditional mythic sense of "preceding apocalypse and Babel's fall" (109) and vertigo as a harbinger of collapsed sociopolitical hierarchies in the Caribbean.

And so all through the night and day
I see the weary and hungry
Crowds – marching – every day
More hungry – every day more sad;
And I hear a great stir of voices
Among those who rule the land
In politics and those who rule in gold;
But the tramp of the weary feet still sound.
They who are free men march on
To seek the bondage from which
Others died to free them – (52-62)

The incoherent "great stir of voices" from "those who rule the land / In politics and those who rule in gold" suggests that British and American Empires adhere to similar power structures, thus registering the parallel aims of global capitalist development and empire building. As the poem illustrates, the most tragic irony of all are the circumstances that reduce black Jamaicans' to seek

incarceration, despite the hard-won battles fought by their ancestors for emancipation. Famine negates freedom.

Marson's portrayals of Jamaica's desperate poverty reflects a crucial historical moment in Caribbean literature, in which nationalist writers in the 1930s began to break away from European literary traditions by promoting "an aesthetic of social engagement" (Donnell and Welsh 112). These revised narratives of the "New Jamaica" went beyond pointing out the racist elements operating the island's modernizing industry, however; nationalist poets like Marson also challenged colonially derived histories of the island's natural environment. Through centuries of Eurocentric travel writings and accounts of the New World's natural history, the English landscape "became both normative and ideal" (Tiffin 200) and the Caribbean "at best exotic, and at worst, aberrant or second-rate" (200). Many black Caribbean writers such as Marson who were formally schooled on England's ostensibly superior geography challenged these long-engrained assumptions through "a literary naming of the landscape" (114). At the heart of this protest was "cultural validity" (Donnell and Welsh 113) through "the project of cultural decolonialization" (114).

Marson's poem, "To the Hibiscus," from *The Moth and Star*, presents a lyrical tribute to dooryard gardens, small plots of land located immediately outside slave dwellings, which supplemented larger tracts of subsistence farming allotted to slaves in the West Indies. The larger tracts of land dooryard gardens supplemented were known as provision grounds, whose purpose was to relieve plantation owners from the responsibility of feeding their own slaves. As Simon Gikandi has argued, the small degree of autonomy that provision grounds enabled eventually transformed into what he calls a "counter-aesthetic," a space where enslaved people both redefined and rejected the theories of exchange value used to enforce slavery (239-242). Higher

maintenance crops, "typically vegetables, herbs, spices, medicinals," were grown in the dooryard gardens, agricultural spaces tended primarily by women (Carney 134). As cultivated spaces that illustrated gendered and racial divisions of labor in the "postplantation" economy, Jamaica's modern subsistence gardens contradicted tourism boosters' portrayals of the island as a Garden of Eden that was naturally systematized, egalitarian, and fruitful. During the "New Jamaica" campaign, botanical gardens, largely comprised of English plants and flowers, had become a crucial part of the island's modern image, symbolizing national unity among England's far-reaching colonies across the hemispheres. In Caribbean literature, the tension between English and Caribbean perspectives on the West Indian environment, as Helen Tiffin asserts, "occurs more often within the liminal zone of the garden, in areas of plantation or cultivated land, and over flowers and floral symbology" (201). Marson's concentration on the hibiscus, a flower more recognizably aligned with Jamaican than with English geography, emphasizes the local landscape as an anchoring point of Caribbean identity:

> Fair Hibiscus oft you linger
> In the gardens of the poor
> Bringing joy and cheer and brightness
> To the peasant's lowly door.
>
> There thy blossoms bloom in splendour
> Telling all that pass you by
> That earth's beauty and earth's gladness
> To the poorest heart is nigh.
>
> Fair Hibiscus, thou art frailer
> Than the blooms of roses rare,
> Picked and prisoned fast thou diest,
> Free, thou growest without care.
>
> Fairest cup of rarest radiance
> Joy thou bringest to my heart,
> Teach me thine own joyful message
> That I may such cheer impart.

To some degree, the hibiscus's emphatically jubilant "message" reflects this turn toward idyllic depictions of West Indian peasantry in literature produced by the black intellectual elite. More notably, however, Marson's explicit focus on the dooryard garden—an emblem of female agricultural labor—offers a feminized ecological perspective during the beginnings of a literary nationalist movement that typically neglected the history of women's particular experiences of the cultivated environment.[92]

Prefiguring the height of the *negritude* movement during the mid-twentieth century, early twentieth-century Caribbean writers were already revising Europeans' natural histories of the New World. What distinguishes "To the Hibiscus" from other poetic treatments of the Caribbean landscape by Marson's contemporaries is its emphasis on the subversive potential of quasi-domestic environmental spaces. Widely associated with the Caribbean's local environment, the hibiscus—a plant originating from Africa (DeLoughrey 304)—also signifies the island's deeply intertwined histories of biotic and human migration. The peasant's floristic composition challenges colonial narratives of natural origins, but, like the provision ground that "creates a space for beauty that exceeds the land's use value and resists the legacy of the plantation economy" (Posmentier 46), the dooryard garden inhabits the simultaneous realms of practical use and aesthetic expression, domestic sphere and public arena.

While Marson's poetic treatments of Jamaica's female laborers and garden spaces sets her apart from many of her contemporaries, her botanical allusions to Jamaica's tragic history in the Atlantic slave trade and her work's complex attitudes toward British literary traditions

[92] Allison Donnell argues that while Marson's poetic tribute to the hibiscus serves as "an implicit allegory of historical injustice" and "the promise of flourishing through liberty" ("Introduction" 29), it also romanticizes the peasant class. Of Marson's years as editor of the *Cosmopolitan*, Leah Rosenberg similarly maintains that Marson's inconsistent attitudes toward gender and class are irresolvable. On the one hand, Rosenberg argues, Marson resists colonial discourse by featuring black middle-class women who "enter into the modern world shielded by the ideal feminine virtues of the Victorian period" ("Modern Romances" 177). On the other hand, she participates in colonial discourse by "redeploying…a division between the modern brown middle class and the primitive black peasant and working class that mirrors the divide between civilized English and primitive Caribbean culture and society" (178).

correspond with writings by other Caribbean writers of the period. The formal and thematic qualities of her poetry, however, resonate most strongly with her Jamaican predecessor Claude McKay. Born in 1890, McKay, sixteen years Marson's senior, "became both the first black Jamaican poet acclaimed for writing skillfully and seriously in Jamaican dialect and the first 'African American' poet" (Maxwell xix) associated with the Harlem Renaissance to receive praise for his politically subversive use of traditional poetic forms. While McKay and Marson did not know each other personally, the international renown that McKay found in the U.S. as a poet inspired Marson to also leave the Caribbean (Jarrett-Macauley 44) and continue her predecessor's "habit of defying the national borders that frame traditional literary history" (Maxwell xi). Her publishers urged her to move to the U.S., where she might cement her literary career among the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Marson was, however, wary of the infamously hostile segregationist culture in the U.S. South, and she worried that she might end up wasting her talents, as had happened to so many African American women, working as a domestic servant in a country that offered even fewer opportunities for middle-class black women than those available in Jamaica (Jarrett-Macauley 44). Nevertheless, Marson's life in England left her feeling disillusioned with racial and gendered barriers she encountered in London. Not unlike Bita Plant, the "transnational heroine" (Lowe 205) of Claude McKay's 1933 novel, *Banana Bottom*, who returns to Jamaica after completing a seven-year sojourn in England, Marson lived in London for an extended period of time and eventually returned to Jamaica. A number of the poems she wrote during her residence in London angrily recall her experiences there with racial discrimination and xenophobia and articulate sharpened feelings of cynicism toward the British Empire. McKay, who also lived abroad as a black Caribbean immigrant, express his "hatred of American racial prejudices" (Cooper 65).[93]

[93] For a full discussion of McKay's early years in the U.S. and his experiences of severely restrictive racial

As several scholars have discussed, quite a few of Marson's later writings appear to be dialogic responses to themes of Caribbean exile, struggles with hybrid identity, and use of Jamaican vernacular in McKay's work. Marson's later intertextual dialogues with McKay's work are crucial points of connections not only between two Jamaican colleagues, but also establish another significant tie between Marson and the Harlem Renaissance. Another significant correspondence between Marson's and McKay's poetry relates to the relationship between landscape and collective memory, which can be seen in Marson's "To the Hibiscus" and McKay's "Flame-Heart." Published in McKay's collection *Harlem Shadows* (1922) ten years after he left Jamaica for the U.S., "Flame-Heart" explores discursive relationships between landscape, memory, and identity. In the manner of an "anti-georgic" (Posmetier 42) catalogue, the speaker repeatedly calls up sensory images of the cultivated Jamaican environment from his childhood years, but refrains from describing the agricultural practices that shaped the landscape's picturesque image; although he catalogues the features of a picturesque Caribbean scenery, the speaker fails to recall the calendrical seasons in which annual changes to the agrarian landscape occurred. Sonya Posmentier argues that "Flame-Heart" is a conceptual provision ground, in which McKay nostalgically "laments the loss of his childhood in Jamaica" (45), but, through the act of forgetting, presents "freedom from work as a form of artistic freedom" (45). While the speaker overwhelmingly fails to place annual changes to the cultivated landscape in calendrical time and thus seemingly emancipates himself from agricultural work, there is a single calendrical memory that haunts the speaker's implicit renouncements of agrarian labor: "innocent" (27), "uncorrupt" (27) childhood pastimes associated with the poinsettia, or flame-heart tree, a localized botanical image McKay imbues with violent connotations. In each

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prejudices there, see Wayne Cooper's biography of McKay (63-102).

of the poem's three stanzas, the speaker repeats the process of forgetting, only to return to the anomalous image of the poinsettia's redly saturated foliage in the month of December:

> I often try to think in what sweet month
> The languid painted ladies used to dapple
> The yellow by-road mazing from the main,
> Sweet with the golden threads of the rose-apple.
> I have forgotten—strange—but quite remember
> The poinsettia's red, blood-red in warm December. (15-20)

In contrast to the poem's painterly descriptions of agricultural land, the description of the poinsettia's "blood-red" leaves elicits the collective memory of enforced migration and labor. Because the flame-heart tree was initially the site of "innocent" and "uncorrupt" childhood pastimes, it is only in retrospect that the speaker recognizes its importance as an emblem of colonial violence. Remarking on parallels between landscapes and the past, Virginia Woolf asserted, "[the past] shifts and changes as the present throws its shadow backward. The landscape also changes, but far more slowly; it is a living link between what we were and what we have become." As a kind of timescape in which memories are spatialized as pastoral and antipastoral images, McKay's "provision ground" embodies a living link between his past and present attitudes toward black Jamaicans. Inherited colonial worldview fades and anticolonial counter-memory comes into relief; in spatio-temporal terms, foreground and background switch positions. In his essay, "Boyhood in Jamaica," published in 1953, McKay remarked that "the people of Jamaica were like an exotic garden planted by God. And today I see them as something more. I see them as a rising people, and sometimes I think that the negroes amongst them will give leadership to the negroes of the world in the great struggle that lies ahead" (143). The poem's bucolic images associated with British colonial rule and the poinsettia connoting anticolonial allegiance and collective trauma signify the speaker's hybrid identity; as a

simultaneous site of recollection and forgetting, the environment reflects the discursive interplay between past and present in the lifelong process of identity formation.

Marson uses a comparable "anti-georgic" catalogue structure in her poem "Confessions," published in *The Moth and Star*, in which she lists various flowers that represent the speaker's hybrid identity as a black West Indian and a British citizen. As opposed to an act of contrition, the speaker's deathbed "confession" proudly upholds these seemingly problematic contradictions. In the first line, the speaker proclaims, "I regret nothing -," asserting again in the final stanza, "I have no regrets -" (75). Throughout the poem, the speaker proclaims that over the course of her life she has experienced oppositional states, such as "heaven" (12) and "hell" (16), "sorrows" (61) and "joys" (64), and "evil" (65) and "good" (65). At one point of the speaker's retrospection, she turns to a botanical catalogue of flowers that elicits a lifelong negotiation of conflicting ideologies of place and identity:

> I know
> The breath
> Of the tulip
> And jessamine,
> I have seen
> Daffodils in Spring
> Roses in June
> And the Poinciana
> Dripping blood. (31-39)

Channeling the English literature, English history, and English geography that were the cornerstone of Marson's formal education (Jarrett-Macauley 19), the "tulip," "jessamine," "Daffodils," and "Roses" reflect the influence of the early Romantics and rural British agriculture on her work. Published a year after Marson's return from England to Jamaica, the poem's floral litany calls to mind the poet's physical sojourns to England's landscape gardens and, more particularly, the fields of daffodils described in Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, which

she had committed to memory as a child. For Marson and her peers, as well as later Caribbean writers, Wordsworth's work was "deeply implicated in the project of curricular indoctrination" (Smith 801).[94] Calling to mind Wilson Harris's assertion that the Caribbean is a "landscape saturated with the traumas of conquest" (8), the image of the "Poinciana / Dripping blood" excavates the historical violence obscured by the botanical overpaint of colonialism. Cultural markers of English national identity and nationalist counter-memory are synthesized—though not reconciled—through the life forces of "breath" and "blood."

Comparable themes of suppressed colonial violence can be seen in Elizabeth Bishop's Depression-era poems about Key West, where she lived for nearly fifteen years during the 1930s and 1940s. Key West, the Anglicanized version of the island's Spanish name, Cayo Hueso—meaning "bone cay," or "isle of bones"—encrypts the bloody history of Spanish conquest, which would later be followed by tumultuous periods of piracy and salvage, labor revolts, nationalist uprisings, and naval military occupation. Key West's wrecking and salvaging economy had made it one of the richest cities in the U.S. during the nineteenth century; but by the mid-1930s, death, poverty, and decay permeated the island, hit hard by the economic depression and, soon after, the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane. Just a year prior to the devastating hurricane, the U.S. Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) had taken over the island, with the intention of economically reviving it by transforming it into a tourist resort (Scandura 72-78).

Like the "New Jamaica" campaign, the FERA takeover largely focused on ridding the city of infrastructural, residential, and historical "garbage" (Scandura 72, 74). Similar to Jamaica,

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[94] This is an instance in which Marson's allusions to Wordsworth's poems about English flowers anticipates later Caribbean writers' recollections of encountering the English landscape they had read about in Wordsworth's poetry (but had never actually seen), the most frequently cited example being Antiguan-American writer Jamaica Kincaid's autobiographical novel *Lucy* (1990). Upon seeing a field of daffodils in England for the first time, Kincaid's protagonist asserts: "they looked beautiful; they looked simple, as if made to erase a complicated and unnecessary idea" (29).

during the late nineteenth century, Key West was promoted as a health resort where middle-class white Americans could escape "'the frantic flurried life of the mainland'" (qtd. in Barnett 160). Brochures were distributed by the Key West Administration during the FERA takeover, titled "Key West—Where the Tropics Begin" (Barnett 164-165). As David Nelson asserts, during the 1930s, state advertising portrayed Florida "as a playground devoid of class, race, unemployment lines, labor disputes, or foreign immigration" (435). South Florida was often described as "combination of Heaven, the Garden of Eden, and Fairyland all rolled into one" (Capó 1-2). Like Jamaica, the geographical insularity of Key West as an island was touted as vacation destination/health resort existing outside of modernity and the inevitable cyclical downswings of capitalism. On a material level, the completion of the Overseas Highway in 1938 physically manifested Key West's economic connection to the continental U.S.

Cigar makers migrated northward. Neither industry could keep up with urban-industrial era. The seventy-year period spanning 1860 to 1930 was one of intense labor unrest in Cuba and Florida (Mormino 1). As Jani Scandura asserts, the island's "alternative myth" (79) of piracy was minimized "as a narrative that replaces revolt and revolution" (79). William C. Barnett notes that, as is still the case today, popular histories relayed to tourists ignored local fishermen, wreckers, and cigar makers (141). Similar to other port cities like Charleston, Key West's economy was strained as it tried to keep up with a newly industrialized economy (151). By the 1930s, abandoned cigar factories proliferated south Florida.

"Jeronimo's House," from Bishop's first published volume, *North and South* (1946), reimagines the domestic life of a former cigar factory worker. In Key West and Miami, workers lived in small houses, or *casitas*, which typically had two or three rooms (Rooney 21).[95] The

[95] This information is not based specifically on Key West, but on archeological studies of casitas in Key West's sister factory community in Ybor City, located in Tampa. From about 1880 to 1910, Ybor City offered the best

cigar worker's sparse, but thoughtfully decorated dwelling echoes the "counter-aesthetic" of the Jamaican dooryard garden in Marson's "To the Hibiscus," in which the dooryard garden, associated with domestic work and agricultural labor, blurs the divide between public and private spaces.[96] The flimsiness of the casita's structure, along with its symbolic references to the suppressed histories of Florida's labor movements and cross-colonial solidarity, embodies its own kind of "unhomeliness," one that, in this case, underscores the cigar worker's migratory existence.

Moreover, the casita's ambiguous demarcation between domestic and public spheres mirrors the narrative diction created by the poem's dialogic structure and form:

> My house, my fairy
> palace, is
> of perishable
> clapboards with
> three rooms in all,
> my gray wasps' nest
> Of chewed-up paper
> glued with spit. (1-8)

The poem's opening description of Jeronimo's modest home as a "fairy palace" evokes early twentieth-century promotional language used by government agencies and transportation companies to refashion Florida's image; for instance, a Florida mayor argued that visitors at the upcoming 1933 Chicago World's Fair should be presented with images of Florida as an "Arabian Night fairyland" (Nelson 448). The promotional discourse tied to Florida echoes touristic portrayals of Jamaica and other Caribbean resort islands as a "fairyland," as we've seen Marson

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living conditions for cigar workers than anywhere else in Florida, Cuba, or in northern cities (Rooney 21). According to Rooney's study, by 1925 many of these houses were occupied by more than one family as a result of the worsening job market for Cuban workers (24).

[96] With regard to Bishop's post-Florida poetry collections, Jeronimo's casita anticipates spatial overlaps in her later poems about the domestic life she shared with Lota de Macedo Soares in Brazil. In poems such as "Songs for the Rainy Season," the lovers' "[h]ouse and garden become continuous with each other" (Hicock 21), a dynamic that illustrates Bhahba's concept of "unhomeliness," in the way it portrays domestic space as the blurring of private and public worlds (20-21).

allude to in her "Jamaica" poems. Complicating this fanciful image that became central to the visual economy of Florida tourism, the ephemeral materials of Jeronimo's whimsical fortress call forth the dramatic boom-and-bust cycles of Key West's economic past and present; additionally, the "perishable / clapboards" foreground the displacement of Key West's immigrant communities and their fundamental, yet obfuscated, roles in the island's economic infrastructure.

The image of the pulpy wasps' nest "glued with spit" elicits the so-called "spit campaigns" launched by American Cigar Company advertisers during the years of the Great Depression. In an effort to wipe out the already dwindling cigar factories operated by Cubans in Havana and Florida, the company's advertisers touted that their machine-rolled cigars were more "sanitary" (Cooper 223) than hand-rolled cigars, which the advertisers claimed were sealed with saliva. The American Cigar Company's rhetoric of contagion resembles the dissemination of racial stereotypes by American tourism and fruit industries in efforts to monopolize those enterprises. Bishop implies that, like the wasp nest, the hand-rolled cigar is a supreme work of painstaking artisanship and design. Bishop's comparison of the hand-rolled cigar to the delicately constructed wasps' nest recalls her admiration for works by outsider artists. Like the earnest composition of "handicraft," whose association with the domestic pertains to "its ability to touch others through the loving labor it registers" (Rosenbaum 84), the purported application of "spit" to hand-rolled cigars, elicited within the domestic confines of the casita, betokens the cigar roller's corporeal investment in his craft. Like Marson's speaker in "Heartbreak Cottages," the narrative voice in Bishop's poem urges its privileged viewers to take a closer look and appreciate the politically significant "counter-aesthetic" of the poor as it also illustrates the economic disparity in tropical paradise.

Bishop's letters written from Key West suggest that the poem was drawn from composite observations of the island's immigrant and African-American communities, who had once worked closely together in the cigar factories. Among other items inside the home described by Bishop are objects signifying the anticolonial ideals that once united various immigrant groups who worked alongside each other in Key West's now-eradicated cigar industry:

> Also I have
> hung on a hook,
> an old French horn
> repainted with
> aluminum paint.
> I play each year
> In the parade
> for José Martí. (41-48)

The French horn invokes nineteenth-century French writers of social realism, such as Victor Hugo, who were overwhelmingly popular among the cigar workers in Key West, Tampa, and Havana (Pozzetta and Mormino 8-9).[97] The anticolonial ideas disseminated by factory readers created a sense of solidarity among the various ethnic groups that worked in the factories, from which emerged a "pan-ethnic 'Latin' identity" (Pozzetta and Mormino 15). As a symbol of the cross-colonial cooperation among African Americans and Cuban, Bahamian, Spanish, and Italian immigrants, the French horn subtly contrasts with the efforts of U.S. travel guides at the time to subdue "the threat of racial difference" (Wesling 443) by portraying lower class non-whites as observable elements of authentic "local color" (441) that validated the specialness of the American landscape, yet also existed outside of modern time. As Meg Wesling argues of the American Guide Series, to help defer challenges that observable racial difference might pose to ideas of national unity, "groups of people became synonymous with, and represented through, the quarters they occupy" (441) in order to convey that they were regionally specific and

[97] In addition to Hugo's novels of social realism, such as *Les Miserables*, Hugo's "Letter to Cuban Mothers," which he wrote during the Ten Years War (Pozzetta and Mormino 8), also endeared him to many native Cubans.

geographically contained.[98] The poem's evocation of inter-American identity disrupts the tendency in American travel literature to conflate categorical groups of people with the quarters they occupy.

As a poet who spent many of her school-age years living in Nova Scotia, at one time a British colony, Bishop, like Marson, understood that Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* was the literary prototype for representing folk culture.[99] Unlike Wordsworth's lyrical persona that implicitly claimed to document the ordinary lives of a monolithic, illiterate lower-class, Bishop's poem presents an autodidact peasant whose national and ethnic makeup is demographically fluid and whose autonomous literacy is politically subversive:

> At night you'd think
> my house abandoned.
> Come closer. You
> can see and hear
> the writing-paper
> lines of light
> and the voices of
> my radio
>
> singing flamencos
> in between
> the lottery numbers.
> When I move
> I take these things,
> not much more, from
> my shelter from
> the hurricane.

Illuminating the speaker's night vision, the "writing-paper / lines of light" echo José Martí's famous description of the Cuban cigar factory as a place where "the hand that folds the tobacco

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[98] Meg Wesling argues that the Federal Writers Project's American Guide Series, produced between 1936 and 1941, should be considered a crucial element in studies of U.S. mid-century literary modernism. Wesley contends that the guide series can be understood as a kind of "crisis modernism" that reflects wider epistemological concerns about race, nationality, and visual representation that surfaced in other works of American literary modernism and in U.S. national consciousness during the 1930s.

[99] In a letter to Robert Lowell, Bishop referred to herself as a "minor female Wordsworth" (*Words in Air* 122).

leaf by day, lifts the text at night" (qtd. in Pozzetta and Mormino 4).[100] In response to increasingly industrialized methods that threatened the already-dwindling jobs available to Caribbean immigrants, labor revolts escalated in Florida during the 1920s; as a result of these resurging labor movements, readers were eventually replaced with radios.[101] The lines "voices / on my radio / singing flamencos" point to the lacunae in touristic portrayals of the island's recent past. Originating from a term meaning "escaped peasant" (Machin-Autenrieth 26), here, the word *flamenco* aptly gestures toward Key West's unofficial status as a plurinational state of refugees.[102] The use of the present tense in the poem's final lines indicate that Jeronimo lives a perpetually migratory existence, moving from one temporary refuge to another.

The poem's structure creates a dialogic relationship between the two columns of text, which typographically creates a double reading that calls to mind the dialogic relationships between individual poems in Marson's first two poetry volumes. Read both vertically and horizontally, the poem's third, fourth, seventh, and eighth stanzas exemplify the way Bishop often manipulates closed forms in order to destabilize closed meanings:

left-over Christmas
    decorations
looped from the corners
    to the middle
above my little
    center table
of woven wicker

At night you'd think
    my house abandoned.
Come closer. You
    can see and hear
the writing-paper
    lines of light
and the voices of

[100] Latins distrusted the "nativist public school system" (Pozzetta and Mormino 9), but benefited from numerous local children and adult educational programs, including night school and language classes (9). The most important disseminators of knowledge, however, were the factory readers (9). The incorporation of readers meant that cigar factories became significant sources of education. At community centers like the San Carlos, immigrants learned to read and write. At the cigar factories, workers were educated on political theory, current events, and history.
[101] After a 1931 labor strike in Tampa, readers were eliminated in all Florida factories (Pozzetta and Mormino 13).
[102] In his 1933 book on the history of flamenco, the Andalusian nationalist Blas Infante argued that the word *flamenco* descends from a Hispano-Arabic term meaning "escaped peasant" (Machin-Autenrieth 26). Infante argued that flamenco was an indigenous music to Andalusia, which supported his contention that the Spanish colony—what Infante in anticolonial spirit called "nuestra pais" ("our country")—should be recognized as an autonomous state (26). In addition to concurrent resistance movements in Andalusia and in Cuba against Spanish colonial rule, Andalusia's status as a national state, both *a part of* and *apart from* Spain, parallels Key West's own ambiguous relation to the continental United States.

painted blue,
and four blue chairs
and an affair
for the smallest baby
with a tray
with ten big beads.
Then on the walls
two palm-leaf fans
and a calendar (17-32)

my radio
singing flamencos
in between
the lottery numbers.
When I move
I take these things,
not much more, from
my shelter from
the hurricane. (49-64)

The poem's formal arrangement into two columns elicits the eerie quiet at the center of a hurricane, while the speaker's centric language, namely the words "center," "middle," and "between," indirectly motions toward the prolonged caesura created by the funnel of negative space between the textual pillars. Read horizontally across the "eye" of the poem, the speaker's imperative, "Come closer. You / to the middle / can see and hear," resembles a broken radio transmission inviting the reader to inferentially fill in the narrative gaps. From the privileged perspective of the tourist looking through the house's windows from outside, Jeronimo's modest home appears quaint, prettified with colorful and inventive decorations. The poem's spatial gap alludes to blind spots in the tourist gaze that blot out the ugly realities of racialized poverty in Key West, as it also "speaks" to the silenced voices of the island's immigrant population.

Mirroring the poem's content which simultaneously pertains to hurricanes and domestic space, the structure of the two columns—resembling ramshackle walls—underscores the precarious state of Jeronimo's physical house and sociopolitical situation. At the end of the corresponding fourth and eighth stanzas, Bishop uses hyperbolic imagery, along with the poem's dialogic structure, to further emphasize the unstable nature of the immigrant's domestic quarters and cyclical journeys of survival. Read crosswise, Jeronimo likens "my shelter" to "two palm-leaf fans," reinforcing the visual flimsiness of the column-walls. In the poem's final two dialogic lines, the horizontal pairing of "calendar" and "hurricane" alludes to the political storms and

economic tumults that, like a repeated calendrical sequence, continually uproot the cigar worker's life. Like many immigrants fleeing dangerous political situations and dire poverty, Jeronimo, a contingent laborer, must subsist on meager wages in unstable, exploitative lines of work.

We can see Bishop manipulate poetic form as a way of ironically extending and/or emphasizing content in other poems that deal with Florida's social landscape during the 1930s. "A Miracle for Breakfast," a poem about a Depression-era breadline in Key West, harkens back to the relationship between form and ironic commentary in Marson's own poem about hunger, "At the Prison Gates." Like other Americans during the 1930s, many Key West residents were angered by the inefficiencies of government aid; like the relief programs in Jamaica that were largely modeled on the American New Deal, the initial aim of U.S. government aid was to support commercial farmers, rather than to provide relief for the poor and displaced. The first federal food relief programs in the U.S. developed under the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations not in response to pandemic starvation but to public outrage at the contradiction that soon became widely known as "the paradox of want amid plenty" (Poppendieck xvi). One of the most conspicuous emblems of this paradox were breadline charities, whose meager rations starkly contrasted with the over 100,000,000 bushels of surplus wheat, bought by the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation, spoiling in U.S. government granaries (46). Though "A Miracle for Breakfast" features a local breadline charity in Key West, it also encapsulates the conspicuous paradox of unequal wealth distribution at the national and global level.

Although the majority of Key West residents were receiving government aid (Scandura 72), popular magazines and tourist media presented the island as a thriving vacation paradise unruffled by the economic depression. As the editor of *The Nation* wrote of Florida in the 1930s,

"'one would have to say that the depression is over in this state. The streets are thronged with tourists'" (qtd. in Nelson 440). Even publications like *The Nation* that enthusiastically covered and supported Roosevelt's New Deal efforts clung to this myth regarding the economic resilience of Florida's tropical archipelago. Magazines and tourist media focused almost exclusively on the island's tourist population and aestheticized or ignored its mostly working-class, non-white residents. Centering on human subjects who are not tourists, but representative of the majority of the island's residents, Bishop's portrayal of a typical day in Depression-era Key West puts hunger in the foreground, thus challenging the focus on tourism numbers as the sole means of gauging local economic health:

> At six o'clock we were waiting for coffee,
> waiting for coffee and the charitable crumb
> that was going to be served from a certain balcony,
> —like kings of old, or like a miracle
> It was still dark. One foot of the sun
> steadied itself on a long ripple in the river.
>
> The first ferry of the day had just crossed the river.
> It was so cold we hoped that the coffee
> would be very hot, seeing that the sun
> was not going to warm us; and that the crumb
> would be a loaf each, buttered, by a miracle.
> At seven a man stepped out on the balcony.
>
> He stood for a minute alone on the balcony
> looking over our heads toward the river.
> A servant handed him the makings of a miracle,
> consisting of one lone cup of coffee
> and one roll, which he proceeded to crumb,
> his head, so to speak, in the clouds—along with the sun.

The ferry transporting tourists across the river is the poem's single reference to the island's tourist population, who are reduced to an idyllic, yet inconsequential, scenic background. In contrast to advertisement claims that the climate in Key West is warm and temperate year-round, the speaker's assertion that "the sun / was not going to warm us" complicates modern medical

geography used to promote the island as a winter health resort. The winter sun's inability to provide warmth and the ferry's regularly scheduled crossings between bodies of land reinforce the interdependent relationships—geoformal, meteorological, and economic—between island and mainland. As with Marson's poem about the Kingston prison incident, Bishop's poem about hunger illustrates the strong economic ties between island and mainland, debunking widespread perceptions that Key West's geographical insularity as an island meant it was resistant to economic problems on the continent. The river's reflection of the rising sun tenuously balanced like a wading bird trying to support itself on a single "foot" in the middle of a "long ripple" evokes U.S. attempts to stabilize itself in the midst of the Depression's changing, widespread ripple-effects.

Similar to the mounting hunger and desperation portrayed in Marson's "At the Prison Gates," Bishop's poem implicitly questions U.S. attempts to understand and respond to its own domestic crisis. The rich man's privileged gaze, "looking over our heads" while his own head remains "in the clouds" signals the failure of the *haves* to understand the scope of need among the *have nots*. "A Miracle for Breakfast," as Jacqueline Vaughn Brogan has noted, exemplifies Bishop's use of fixed forms to create "ironic poetic 'prisons' within which she is able to produce superficially reticent, but finally ruthless and reverberating social commentaries" (242). Here, the restrictive nature of the sestina formally replicates the socioeconomic prisons created by poverty. The repetitive nature of the sestina, enhanced by Bishop's understated diction, mirrors the drudgery of everyday life for those most disenfranchised. Comparable to Marson's use of anaphora, the repeated terminating words of Bishop's sestina, particularly the "miracle" of relief and hope that never materializes, captures the poor's escalating frustration and demoralization:

> Was the man crazy? What under the sun
> was he trying to do, up there on his balcony!

> Each man received one rather hard crumb,
> which some flicked scornfully into the river,
> and, in a cup, one drop of the coffee.
> Some of us stood around, waiting for the miracle.

Roughly midway through the poem, the speaker's exclamation, "Was the man crazy? What under the sun / was he trying to do, up there on his balcony!" reflects the growing sense of frustration among Key West's disenfranchised residents, still "waiting for the miracle" disingenuously promised by those in power. Harkening back to the dizzying spire of imperialist babble in "At the Prison Gates, the public's angry response to the meager "crumb" "which some flicked scornfully into the river," connotes labor strikes. In Key West, as in Jamaica, labor strikes were inseparable from racial politics. During the WPA workers' strike in December 1935, WPA administrators worried that the "charged atmosphere" of the protest might lead to a "race riot" (Scaundura 110). As Jani Scandura asserts, "For Bishop, New Deal efforts to protect Key West from the economic wreckage of modernity's maelstrom are built for the white working classes. They omit, even erase, the racialist elements of government aid" (110).[103]

Recalling the ornate ironwork balconies of Charleston that signified lingering remnants of a supposedly bygone plantation economy, the rich man's balcony signifies strategies drawn from distortions of scientific and religious ideas in an attempt to reconcile the existence of poverty with the assumptions of a liberal society, chiefly the belief in the freedom of all individuals to participate in citizenship and the marketplace. In the poem's final two sextets, the balcony intersects with the idea that wealth primarily springs from chance, as opposed to intrinsic superiority or the Protestant work ethic:

> I can tell what I saw next; it was not a miracle.
> A beautiful villa stood in the sun

[103] On a national scale, the fear of violence loomed across the continental U.S. In 1933, the American Association of Social Workers "warned of possible violence by the unemployed if adequate relief measures were not taken" (Poppendiek xv).

and from its doors came the smell of hot coffee.
In front, a baroque white plaster balcony
added by birds, who nest along the river,
—I saw it with one eye close to the crumb—

and galleries and marble chambers. My crumb
my mansion, made for me by a miracle,
through ages, by insects, birds, and the river
working the stone. Every day, in the sun,
at breakfast time I sit on my balcony
with my feet up, and drink gallons of coffee.

We licked up the crumb and swallowed the coffee.
A window across the river caught the sun
as if the miracle were working, on the wrong balcony.

In the first half of the poem, the balcony visually reinforces the socially elevated position of the "charitable" rich man, who is accompanied by a "servant." The irony of the speaker's earlier comparison of the line of hungry people to "kings of old" underscores the extreme contrast between the poor and, in Marson's words, "those who rule the land / In politics and those who rule in gold." Toward the end of the poem, Bishop ironically describes nature in architectural terms associated with wealthy homes: "beautiful villa," "galleries," "marble chambers," and "mansion." Nature, that is to say the random drop site of bird excrement, has created the "baroque white plaster balcony" affronting the "beautiful villa." In the sixth stanza, the speaker asserts, "*My* crumb," denoting those who possess little, and "*my* mansion," denoting those who possess much: the speaker ultimately arrived at his or her current economic circumstances by way of chance, which Bishop likens to nature's indiscriminate events, such as "insects, birds, and the river / working the stone."

While Bishop grapples with the irrationality of pandemic hunger in "A Miracle for Breakfast," a number of her unpublished poems from the depression era dwell on capitalist ideologies that endorse false or misleading representations. Poems such as "The Salesman's

Evening," "Edgar Allen Poe & the Juke-Box," and "The Soldier and the Slot-Machine" show Bishop's intense interest in persuasive strategies used in commercial and propagandist rhetoric. Of those unpublished poems, "The Salesman's Evening" most strongly corresponds with ideologies of individualism and wealth acquisition examined in "A Miracle for Breakfast" and with other works of American literature from the Great Depression and post-war era that pessimistically critique the American Dream, particularly the idea that image and charisma are the most important assets to achieving success. The poem's first stanza introduces the poem's central theme of fraudulence by drawing attention to touristic myths that falsely represent exotic locales, such as Key West, as immutable utopias sequestered from capitalist systems based entirely on salesmanship:

> Seen by twilight, it is a beautiful town,
> (We cannot give the name)
> And, as far as beauty goes, it is proud to own,
> It is exactly the same
> As it was /two/ hundred years ago. But then
> There were no ugly shops, there were no travelling salesmen. (1-6)

The first line of the poem immediately hones in on the dubiousness of touristic representation, as suggested by twilight's flattering, softly filtered illumination. The speaker's parenthetical aside, "(We cannot give the name)," carries a sense of subversion, suggesting the poem's account of events, anonymously transmitted "off the record," contradicts the town's idyllic public image. Withholding the town's name also suggests the location's falsely picturesque image is a granular reflection of the way mass-selling campaigns seeped into broader U.S. culture.[104] Bishop's play on words, "proud to own," not only refers to local pride in the town's "beauty," but also registers

[104] Beginning in the 1920s, psychologists became interested in whether consumer desires were instinctual or built through suggestion (Friedman 6). Although salesmen and corporate leadership were viewed more negatively following the 1929 stock market crash, psychologists, economists, self-help gurus, and the general public continued to show widespread interest in the "mechanics of persuasion" (9). The "science of salesmanship" permeated academic discourse and popular self-help books alike. Dale Carnegie's self-help book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1937), (still a best-seller today) exemplifies the increasingly wide application of salesmanship principles during the early twentieth century (247).

popular business discourse of the 1920s which conceptualized the U.S. not in terms of federated states but "sales 'territories" (Friedman 5). The biggest selling point of the town, mythic suspension in time, resembles the Edenic mythology of timelessness at the center of Marson's tourism-themed poems. Similar to the way Marson reveals that highways and automobiles—emblems of modernity and American capitalist expansion—intersect with Jamaica's rural laboring economy, Bishop's poem counters touristic myths regarding tropical islands' insularity from the encroachments of modernity, emphasizing that "ugly [tourist] shops" and "travelling salesmen" have significantly altered the physical and cultural landscape.[105]

Other poems from *North & South* interrogate the material and ideological conventions of realism deployed in state guidebooks and other promotional materials specific to Florida. The surrealist fluctuations among different physical dimensions, abstract concepts, and expressive mediums that Peggy Samuels locates in Bishop's more mature work can be traced back to her poems from *North & South*, in which she connects the representational limitations of realism explicitly challenged in works of Surrealism and those implicitly avoided in American tourist aesthetics. "Florida," first published in 1938, is "an effort to speak the past" (Hicok, "Becoming a Poet" 114). Recalling the intersections between historic preservation and women's poetry associated with the Charleston Renaissance, the poem performs a kind of "excavation" of Florida's colonial history while also drawing parallels between genocide and racial violence in the past and present:

> The state with the prettiest name,
> the state that floats in brackish water,
> held together by mangrove roots

[105] In twentieth century literature, the salesman is the most consistent and recognizable symbol of American business. In Bishop's poem, the salesman's inability to distinguish between reality and illusion resonates with popular fictional portrayals of salesmen during the Great Depression as weak characters who are ineffectual and delusional, as seen in Thornton Wilder's novel, *Heaven's My Destination* (1935), Eudora Welty's short story, "Death of a Travelling Salesman" (1941), and, most notably, Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman* (1949).

> that bear while living oysters in clusters,
> and when dead strew white swamps with skeletons,
> dotted as if bombarded, with green hummocks
> like ancient cannon-balls sprouting grass. (1-7)

Bishop's description of Florida as having "the prettiest name" evokes the language of state guidebooks which emphasized regional distinctiveness through the "aesthetic of the picturesque" (Wesling 429).

> Enormous turtles, helpless and mild,
> die and leave their barnacled shells on the beaches,
> and their large white skulls with round eye-sockets
> twice the size of a man's. (17-20)

The images of "skeletons," "cannon-balls," and "skulls" associated with the landscape in its present form invert the temporal distance used in guidebooks to sequester colonial violence to the abstracted past. Beyond the ratio of physical scale, the syntactical closeness of the turtles' "large white skulls" to that of "man's" suggests an interdependent, rather than hierarchical relationship. As a result of industrialization, namely steamboats travelling up and down the Atlantic coast, Key West's local turtle population had collapsed by the 1930s (Barnett 153). Although the island became widely known as a venue for sports fishing, the depletion of the island's local marine life and its devastating effects on everyday commercial fishermen were omitted from touristic narratives, since the collapse of local sea turtle and sponge populations challenged "the typical depiction of the Florida Keys as a rich, thriving marine ecosystem" (151).[106] Here, Bishop reverses the traditional perspective employed in colonial travel narratives and their modern adaptation in state guidebooks, both of which, as Wesling argues, elevate the tourist-spectator above the observed environment (430). Bishop's collapse of this hierarchy echoes what Jana Evans Braziel, drawing from Edouard Glissant's model of Caribbean identity,

[106] According to the 1939 *WPA Guide to Florida*, edited by Zora Neale Hurston, the majority of the large turtles butchered at Key West's soup canneries were brought in from the Cayman Islands; many of the animals were over 100 years old.

terms "*poetics of (eco-)relation*" in works that "position the violence of genocide and ecocide as intertwined" (112).

Reminiscent of the anti-georgic catalogue structure employed by Marson and McKay, in which botanical images signify collective memories of colonial violence, the poem transitions into a short list of shells and seeds which "reveal as they conceal the violent history that informs them" (Lowney 87). In dredging up a small indigenous artifact, the poem envisions a kind of archeological excavation that alternately remembers and forgets the suppressed history of colonial violence:

> Job's Tear, the Chinese Alphabet, the scarce Junonia,
> Parti-colored pectins and Ladies' Ears,
> arranged as on a gray rag of rotted calico,
> the buried Indian Princess's skirt;
> with these the monotonous, endless, sagging coast-line
> is delicately ornamented. (24-29)

Bishop's simile comparing the shell-lined beach with the decorated skirt of the Indian Princess instructs readers to see the indigenous woman as a symbol of Florida. If we read "Florida" as an excavation of the state's buried violent history and the Indian Princess as the archeologist's desired artifact, the recovery is only partially successful, as merely a fragment of her clothing, "a gray rag of rotted calico," is recovered from the burial site. This is somewhat similar to the dynamic between recollection and amnesia in Robert Frost's poetry that grapples with Europeans' historically violent treatment of Native Americans, what Jeff Westover describes as "the conflict in Frost's poetry between the dutiful forgetting that accepts the metaphor of the nation as a family and the sometimes less sociable act of remembering that troubles that metaphor" (215). The irretrievability of the Indian Princess's actual corpse simultaneously performs white settler amnesia as it also registers the extent to which histories of U.S. colonial violence are suppressed; at the same time, the evasiveness of the incarnate Indian Princess

challenges Eurocentric traditions of ethnographic cataloging that implicitly claim ownership of and access to comprehensive knowledge.

Although the poem concerns itself with uncovering the buried past and its resonances with colonial agendas in the present day, it is also a reevaluation of the Indian Princess as an overdetermined image in America's iconographic heritage. Since the sixteenth century, cartographers, political cartoonists, printmakers, landscape painters, and graphic artists have continuously rendered the Indian princess (or a similar version thereof) as a personified abstraction of New World conquests, and, later, U.S. sovereignty.[107] As a "quasi-official" (Higham 78) symbol of a geoculturally diverse and disbanded nation, the gender of the Indian princess conveys "nurturance, sacrifice, and organic rootedness" (79). Many critics have discussed Bishop's complex responses to "historically coded and publically recognizable conventions" (Blasing 267) that equate nature with femaleness, figurative devices which can never be completely extracted from the semantic lexicon available to her. The "monotonous, endless, sagging coast-line" evokes the innumerable corpses literally entombed throughout the Florida frontier and beneath the surrounding "brackish water," but it also registers the archeologist-poet's burden of sifting through "monotonous, endless" repetitions of the Americas presented as a domesticated female savage in the hopes of recovering a usable—and authentic—past.

[107] As John Higham explains, "The role of the Indian in the personification of an American nation was supplementary and mythic rather than primary and explicit. The Indian princess could not herself represent the nation" due to the historically antagonistic relationship between Europeans and Native Americans. Although "never explicitly spelled out, her mythic role became quasi-official" (77-78).

Recalling the correlations between temporal darkness and anticolonial counter-narrative in "Jeronimo's House," as well as in Marson's "Jamaica" poems, the poem descends into nightfall, signifying a counter-map of marginalized human geographies: [108]

> The mosquitoes
> go hunting to the tune of their ferocious obbligatos.
> After dark, the fireflies map the heavens in the marsh
> until the moon rises. (36-40)

Nightfall represents both heightened danger and clandestine mobility, evocative of Florida's historical "black codes" that forbid African Americans from public spaces after dark and the swamplands where fugitive slaves hid.[109] Similar to Marson's counter-maps of Jamaica's modern infrastructure and Edenic landscape, the "map" of fireflies hovering over the dark swamp gestures toward Florida's fugitive Maroon and Seminole colonies, who removed themselves from the Unites States, in the recesses of its geography. Before the fugitive subjects associated with these recesses can be traced, the poem fast-forwards past this temporal window, obscuring the full dimensions of its human elements.

Following the poem's thwarted attempt to bring the fugitive reaches of swampland fully into light, the poem's textual space abruptly collapses into a two dimensional picture postcard. Bishop's magnified view of a postcard lithograph exemplifies her frequent myopic attention to detail which reveals and destabilizes the social constructs that shape acts of vision:

> Cold white, not bright, the moonlight is coarse-meshed,

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[108] Similar to the "endless waxworks" in Bishop's unpublished poem, the abrupt shift from one temporality to another, all while maintaining present tense, is suggestive of the life-sized dioramas popularly featured in Florida's state exhibitions and natural history museums. In the second half of the 1930s, the Florida National Exhibits, a largely government-run organization, created cutting-edge dioramas through which Florida asserted itself as the leading state in the "'science of showmanship'" (Nelson 449). Many of the dioramas featured mobile life-sized objects, as well as human and animal figures. A number of these more sophisticated dioramas simulated temporalization through mechanized light, which allowed exhibit curators to create the illusion of sunrises and sunsets (463).

[109] According to Hurston's historical and anthropological research for the 1939 *WPA Guide to Florida*, before the Civil War, free and enslaved people of color were forbidden from appearing on the streets of Key West without written permission (57).

> and the careless, corrupt state is all black specks
> too far apart, and ugly whites; the poorest
> post-card of itself.
> After dark, the pools seem to have slipped away.
> The alligator, who has five distinct calls:
> friendliness, love, mating, war, and a warning—
> whimpers and speaks in the throat
> of the Indian Princess. (30-48)

The patterns of "coarse-meshed" textures and "black specks" evoke a cheaply printed postcard, as they also allude to Florida's "divided social landscape," suggesting, as John Lowney asserts, that Florida's "legacy of conquest and slavery is neither confined to the past nor buried" (Lowney 88). Similar to how Marson foregrounds Jamaica's strict racial caste system obscured within postcard souvenir images, the poem's concluding image "explores what we do not see in Florida's picture postcards and pretty name" (Hicok, "Becoming a Poet" 113), revealing a historical continuum between the colonial violence of the past and the modern Jim Crow South. If the postcard Bishop presents is a kind of palimpsest, the poem reads/views the alternate postcard that it obscures.

In addition to the South's racial apartheid signified by the lithograph's diffuse pattern of black and white, the poem's final section elicits postcard photographs of Seminole tribes, an indispensable part of Florida's tourist economy during the 1930s.[110] Viewed as rare documents of a people "in passing" (West 31), these picture-postcards would often feature a Seminole alligator wrestler, who, in a display of complete mastery over the animal, would either rest his chin on the animal's closed mouth or insert his head, face-down, into the alligator's open jaws.[111]

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[110] As discussed by ethnohistorian Patsy West, for the Florida Seminole tribes who resisted being relocated to U.S. government-regulated reservations (further complicating the United States' so-called "Indian problem"), alligator hunting and alligator wrestling offered them a way of remaining semi-autonomous from the U.S. government and economy (West 43). American Indians, essentially slaves in their own land, had no choice but to exploit their own resources.

[111] Numerous examples of alligator wrestling postcard images are featured in the State Archives of Florida's digital postcard collection, as part of its "Florida Memory Program."

The poem's concluding image of a conjoined alligator and human bears resemblance to the humanoid creature in Bishop's earlier poem, "The Man-Moth," which, as Susan Rosenbaum has argued, corresponds to the "human-animal hybrids common in the work of women Surrealist painters and in Max Ernst's 'Natural History' frottages" ("Bishop and the Natural World," 72). In "The Man-Moth," the reader becomes "a potential hunter," or "amateur naturalist who seeks realist knowledge of the rare or obscure" (74) through a "human vision" (74) that covets the unseen and unknown. Similarly in "Florida," the reader becomes a hunter for realist documentation of one of the last remaining "primitive" groups untouched by modernity, human relics of a past on the brink of extinction. While we are told that the alligator "speaks in the throat / of the Indian Princess," the spatial relationship between human and animal eludes precise, rational vision (Are the alligator's body and Indian princess's corpse completely integrated? Do they form some sort of dual-headed, inter-species ouroboros? Or is the alligator positioned above the Indian Princess as it bends over to speak into her "throat," thereby inverting the human-animal spatial structure seen in so many popular souvenir postcards depicting Seminole alligator wrestlers?). Just as the Indian Princess's corpse evades the archeologist's grasp, Bishop's disorienting view of an ethnographic document precludes a "totalizing perspective" (Blasing 266) formed by acts of "defining, collecting, or cataloguing it in terms of its otherness" (Rosenbaum, "Bishop and the Natural World" 75).

Bishop's interest in Florida and the wider circumCaribbean region as offering a revisionist spatial narrative of U.S. history was not new to U.S. modernism. Nor were elements of ethnographic fascination and patriarchal conventions that, as others have argued, are also at times evident in her work. As Priscilla Paton notes of Bishop's poetic treatments of traditionally feminized colonial and ecological spaces, "Bishop potentially places herself in both the roles of

the violated and the violator" (176). An important departure from works by earlier modernists, however, is the degree to which her poetry self-reflexively critiques its own essentialist assumptions and agendas. Many of her white modernist predecessors, including Hart Crane, Robert Frost, William Faulkner, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams, "looked to the Caribbean to reclaim a lost dimension of New World history and a multicultural vision of art and literature in the American hemisphere" (Karem 87). While these writers' portrayals of the Caribbean challenged "Eurocentric models of American identity" (88), most of them "shared a common faith in the necessity for ethnic cultures to remain true to their roots" (88), and thus (with the exception of Faulkner) avoided directly broaching the topic of "cultural intermixture" (88) or the possibility of "hidden, hybrid dimensions" (88) in U.S. culture and history. As demonstrated in Bishop's poem, "Jeronimo's House," which identifies Key West as a plurinational and pan-Latin space, she often conspicuously pits examples of cultural hybridity against markers of difference. In contrast to unself-conscious attitudes of ambivalence toward racial mixing in many works by early twentieth-century white U.S. writers, we see "Bishop's determination to expose the tension between her attempts to identify with those marked as racially different from herself and her own investment in maintaining those very distinctions" (Zona 49).

Another important distinction between Bishop and her modernist predecessors are, as others have demonstrated, her appropriations of literary devices that reinforce gendered hierarchies through traditionally feminized, fetishized personifications of nature. As suggested in Bishop's appropriated figuration of the Indian Princess, the social constructions that feminize nature and nations as female are also closely linked to fixed notions of ethnic identity. The process of excavating the Indian Princess exposes gendered icons of "U.S. ancestry" embedded

in the nation's psyche as it also reveals the heterogeneous, hybrid nature of Florida's—and by extension U.S. America's—suppressed ethnic and indigenous origins. This particular departure in Bishop's work from earlier modernists is clearly exemplified when we compare "Florida" to Stevens's early Key West poems. Stevens, who profoundly influenced Bishop's early work, regularly visited Cuba and Florida and intermittently lived in Key West. In his most widely read poem about Key West, "Ideas of Order at Key West," from his second poetry volume, *Ideas of Order* (1935), epistemological tensions between reality and perception strongly resonate with similar crises surrounding the collection and formulation of knowledge in "Florida."

In Stevens's earlier Key West poems, however, Florida is often gendered female in explicitly racialized and sexualized language. In "O Florida, Venereal Soil," the first Key West poem in his collection, *Harmonium* (1923), Stevens personifies Florida as a dark, seductive female sovereign of ambiguous ethnic and national origins who rampantly spreads sexually transmitted disease. A repository of immigrants, exiles, and dark-skinned pariahs, Florida is both a madonna and a whore open to contagion:[112]

> The dreadful sundry of this world,
> The Cuban, Polodowsky,
> The Mexican women,
> The negro undertaker
> Killing the time between corpses
> Fishing for crayfish...
> Virgin of boorish births, (8-14)

[112] Published only a few years after the end of World War I, the poem also reflects widespread anxieties in the U.S. at a particular historical moment regarding the mass importation of sexually transmitted diseases into the United States immediately after the war, a public health epidemic largely concentrated in port cities along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. The number of sexually transmitted diseases in Key West grew exponentially during the First World War, and later the Second World War, due to the anonymity and mass mobility that war facilitated. In addition to sexually transmitted diseases, epidemics of influenza, dengue, and other infectious diseases soon followed the return of army and navy personnel to the United States by way of port cities in Florida and throughout the wider South Atlantic region (Bigler 6).

Florida's bestowed title, "Virgin of boorish births," alludes to both religious and regal queenliness: a maternal madonna who relentlessly births low-born offspring and a bastard queen who, as the figurehead of the "dreadful sundry" of immigrants and blacks, fails to "disclose" (7, 32) an unambiguous ethnic identity. "Wearing a clear tiara / Of red and blue and red" (25-26), the figurative queen reveals no clear allegiance. In the U.S. South, immigrants and non-whites, as John Lowe notes, have long been "used as a psychic dumping ground – the 'not us' that therefore supposedly defines 'us'" (142). While Stevens may have looked to the Caribbean as a source of artistic renewal and revisionist history of U.S. colonialism, the poem's description of Key West's ethnic diversity as the "dreadful sundry of this world" conveys "a sense of horror at the multicultural space on the Key" (Karem 92). This "familiar colonial stance," Jeff Karem asserts, initially connects the word *venereal* in the poem's title "to a sense of contamination or disease" (92). The correlation between death and Florida's multiethnic progeny resonates with medicalized rhetorics of "contagion" (Lowe 96) and "infection" (96) embedded in white fear regarding racial hybridity and intimate racial mixing, a discourse of disease and of interracial sex also linked to the suppressed history of the Haitian Revolution's African slave revolt (95-97). Recalling Key West's "political legacy of rebellion" (Scandura 80), including the recent labor and nationalist movements in Florida and Cuba during the 1920s (when Stevens wrote the poem), the speaker's anxious response to Key West's ethnic heterogeneity implies a sense of unease regarding possible rebellion against racialized power structures.

An unpublished poem she had planned to include in the "Bone Key" collection, titled "Florida Deserta," depicts Key West as a quarantined island during an outbreak of the mosquito-carrying virus, dengue, otherwise known as "breakbone fever." As in other port cities throughout the circumCaribbean, including (in the U.S.) Miami, Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans,

Galveston, (in Cuba) Havana, and (in Jamaica) Kingston, dengue outbreaks were frequent in Key West up until the mid-twentieth century, largely the result of commercial activities (Dick et al. 584). In efforts to secure Key West's profitability as a health resort, tourism promoters emphasized narratives of a benevolent, controllable nature. The FERA campaign transformed the island's public image from that of a cesspool of infectious disease to a utopia of health and rejuvenation. In the early twentieth century, Key West's public image, like that of Jamaica, projected a harmonious Garden of Eden immune to nature's hostile and infectious elements. Similar to the way Marson alludes to Jamaica's malleability as a colonial space of intersecting medical topographies and tourist economies, Bishops's portrayal of disease outbreak destabilizes promotional myths of island immunity and health and highlights the shapeshifting nature of medical discourse in the face of commerce. Furthermore, the poem's rumination on Key West as a modern colony of disease-quarantine demonstrates that FERA's public relations campaign could not sever Key West's epidemiological ties to the Caribbean, including the dispersal of real and mythic diseases through tangled routes of tropical bioecology and settler colonialism.[113] The first stanza's depiction of Key West as lazaretto of isolated patients immediately evokes Florida's massive mortality rates associated with yellow fever and other infectious diseases during the antebellum period; however, it is simultaneously suggests a geographical allegory for modern myths of contamination based on fear of otherness:

> Oh summer clouds that come so low, come down,
> come down the streets of the tourist-deserted town,
> shade the houses,
> soothe the eyes,
> come down so every head can wear
> a cold compress
> descend, surround, and dissipate the glare,

[113] Among Charles Darwin's journal entries in *The Voyage of the Beagle*, which had a significant impact on Bishop, he recorded: "It is asserted that on the arrival of a stranger (at St. Kilda) all the inhabitants, in the common phraseology, catch a cold."

banish the break-bone fever.

The widespread panic conveyed by empty streets of the "tourist-deserted town" indicate that Key West is still plagued by its historical reputation for being an unhealthy place. While the speaker's plea for the clouds to "dissipate the glare" obviously refers to scorching summer heat, it simultaneously registers two alternate meanings: *glare* as an expression of social animosity and *fever glare* associated with fever-induced delirium. In light of these associations, Bishop appears to show us a landscape of quarantine that is as socially (racially? socioeconomically?) divided as it is medically partitioned. "Break-bone fever," the colloquial term for dengue's symptomatic joint pain, registers social fracture as much as it does physical illness. At its most basic, quarantine is a spatial response to suspicion, threat, and uncertainty, and although the poem does not directly mention fear of racial contamination, its suggestion of social paranoia and antagonism calls up mythical connections between the island's ethnic diversity and the prevalence of disease.[114]

"Key West," an unpublished poem likely written between 1938 and 1942, presents an ominous picture of a carnival set up in the lot of a demolished cigar factory.[115] The poem is divided into two demarcated parts, each comprised of a ten-line stanza. In the first stanza, Bishop gives a vivid description of a high-diver's dramatic plummet into a canvas pool; the beginning of the second stanza provides a brief glimpse into the past, when the cigar factory was still intact

[114] During the first one-hundred years of its U.S. settlement, Key West was considered one of the deadliest parts of the world due to the prevalence of tropical diseases. Until the turn of the century, when tourism promoters repackaged Florida as a health resort, Key West, more than any other part of the state, had a reputation for being an unhealthy place following U.S. settlement in the 1820s (Barnett 145). Existing travel accounts from the antebellum period often noted a contrast between the island's idyllic setting and the proliferation of deadly illness, particularly yellow fever. Some of the travel accounts that depicted Key West decay intimated a connection between the island's ethnic diversity, particularly its Spanish-speaking Cuban and black Caribbean inhabitants, and the prevalence of filth, decay, and disease (Barnett 158-159).

[115] In a letter written to Marianne Moore in 1938, just as the U.S. was preparing to officially enter the Second World War, Bishop describes a carnival that appears to have inspired this specific poem: "We have a Carnival here now, set up on the vacant lot beside the burnt-out deserted factory. It is quite a thorough little Carnival with a high-diving tower, a merry-go-round, trained apes, etc., and I hope to be able to make some photographs of it worth sending to you" (*One Art* 70).

and in operation, before returning to the carnival attractions in the present. The poem's temporal boomerang recalls Marson's use of dialogic sequences to illuminate subtexts in her "Jamaica" poems, whose antipastoral narratives—occluded by blind spots in the "tourist gaze"—become more conspicuous in retrospect. In highlighting the island's Caribbean heritage, Bishop portrays the carnival as a palimpsest of suppressed imperialist histories.[116] As the poem's violent imagery suggests, the carnival festivities belie the violence of American imperialist conquest and the imminent threat of World War II. Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, Bishop became increasingly distressed by the navy's rapid encroachment upon Key West when tensions with Germany rose during the Battle of the Atlantic as the U.S. fought to control the flow of trade in the Western Hemisphere and secure its territories and economic holdings in the Caribbean. As Camille Roman has noted, "A civilian woman in a major military center who nearly lost her house to navy construction, Bishop was placed in a unique position for viewing the collapse between the military and civilian worlds" (28). In Part I of "Key West," Bishop implicitly likens the carnival and the surrounding seascape to a scene ravaged by a scorched earth military attack:

> They have set up the carnival, the carnival,
> In the back-lot of the burnt-out cigar factory,
> And the high-diver, before he leaps to his canvas pool
> From the ladder festooned with colored lights, can see
> Down into the ruins, and then all over the town,
> Over the tin roofs to the blacked-out ocean,
> The surrounding water, like sheets of carbon paper,
> Used and re-used. With display of mock emotion
> He sets a match to himself: flaming, he falls
> Like a wagon of war past the gutted stucco walls.

The cigar factory's demolished structure, "burnt-out" and "gutted" of its insides, resembles a disemboweled corpse, the charring of its remains an attempt to erase the history of its besieged "ruins." The high diver, whom Bishop compares to a flaming "wagon of war," evokes the image

[116] Bishop explores complex connections between Carnival and issues of imperialism in her later work as well, most notably in her poem "Pink Dog," which depicts a carnival in Rio de Janeiro.

of a dropped bomb, while the "blacked-out ocean" evokes the air raid blackouts across U.S. coasts during World War II (and perhaps a similar atmosphere Bishop witnessed during her earlier sojourns in Europe). Bishop's multilayered simile comparing the ocean to "carbon paper, / Used and re-used" points to the Atlantic as a site of colonial violence, as it also alludes to the ongoing naval cold war, as German submarines prowled Caribbean waters and the American Atlantic shoreline, targeting U.S. cargo vessels. By the early 1940s, the destruction of ships in American coastal waters—witnessed by thousands of horrified tourists on east coast beaches, including Key West—visibly dispelled widespread perceptions that the dangers of war were far away overseas.[117] From the vantage point of Key West's harbor during these instances of naval warfare, the Atlantic horizon must have looked like an ocean of fire.

Whereas Part I of the poem creates a correspondence between air raid blackouts and widespread denial regarding the threat of landward warfare, Part II dwells on the metaphorical blackout of American imperialism from U.S. civic memory and the discourse of modern empire. The U.S. sought to protect and expand its economic empire by strengthening its naval bases and "Americanizing" territories such as Key West with close historical and cultural ties to the Caribbean. As Jani Scandura posits, "By erasing the material signifiers of Key West's troubled and rebellious Caribbean history, FERA seemed to reassert the authority of a sanitized Anglo-American patriarchy that might be extended to the whole, heterogenous United States" (81). As Bishop suggests in this stanza, imperialism is not restricted to "somewhere else" but continues to actively reshape U.S. landscapes and dispossess its non-white populations:

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[117] Despite Germany's increasingly aggressive encroachment upon U.S. coastal waters, some seaboard cities, including Miami, did not enforce blackouts so as not to negatively impact the tourism industry, thus essentially creating a "neon shooting gallery" in which American ships were highly visible to German naval forces (Kennedy 566). In the spring and summer of 1942, "Burning hulks lit American beaches from Cape Cod to Hampton Roads, from the Outer Banks to the Florida Keys" (568).

> Where six hundred men used to work at rolling cigars
> To fill the boxes with the ornate lids
> That showed a woman with roses in her hair
> And tulle-draped bust—a woman like her bids
> The citizens to come and see her dancers,
> Guaranteed to wear nothing but feather fans and jewels,
> And a man with the face of an educated ape
> Lures them to see the educated mules.
> While Negro children, who are not allowed,
> Look on solemnly from among the crowd.

Read in relation to the colonial imageries of the Jamaican market woman and the allegorical figure of the Indian princess, the advertising schemes of sexual appeal in Key West reproduce a similar visual culture that sells escapist "products" (resort islands, exotic luxuries, sexual tourism, etc.). through sexual and racial objectification. Recalling the repressed narratives of labor rebellions and the American Cigar Company's rhetoric of contagion in Bishop's other poem, "Jeronimo's House," the skeletal remains of the cigar factory signify that "part of what the reconstruction of Key West concealed was U.S. imperial aggression" (Scandura 80). Ironically, Carnival is traditionally conceived of as a festival where social hierarchies temporarily collapse. In Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism, Carnival as a literary trope is often distinguished by the presence of the "grotesque body," whose exaggerated features or hyperbolic expressions materially demonstrate the death of abstract social distinctions (20-21). Despite the grotesque gesture of the high diver's "display of mock emotion," in Bishop's portrayal of Key West's social festivity, "the carnival is segregated from the start" (Scandura 110). The African American children who are refused admittance, along with the Key West's rebellious Caribbean history blackened out from tourist narratives, implicate regimes of ethnic and eugenic gatekeeping at home in the U.S. The parallels Bishop illustrates between past and present U.S. imperialist aggression, economic competition, and racial oppression conjure up old proverbs of cause and effect: *history repeats itself*.

In "Edgar Allen Poe & the Juke-Box," another unpublished poem Bishop had planned to include in "Bone Key," and then later in *A Cold Spring*, we encounter another Key West locale in which oppressive social dynamics are submerged beneath a festive scenery. Set in a Key West barroom, the poem depicts a scene of drunkenness centered around a jukebox. Several critics have read the poem's "suggested euphemism" (Schwartz 60) of "mechanical sexual pleasures" (Cleghorn 73) as an expression of Bishop's lesbian sexuality, and its reference to Poe's theory of exactness as a "rejection of tradition as a permanent standard" (Cleghorn 80). While there is a libidinal energy linked with the jukebox, whose technology enhances the intoxicating effects of alcohol, references to burning, blindness, decay, and murder suggest there are more complex, sinister machinations operating at the psychosocial level. Potential narratives of sexual/aesthetic/queer liberation are negated by undertones of "compulsion" (Rosenbaum 73) associated with alcohol dependence, references to deception, and imagistic suggestions of social control. In a notebook entry written in 1935, when Bishop appears to have begun working on "Edgar Allen Poe & the Juke-Box," she draws an analogy between Poe's theory of exactness and social propaganda: "That's where a foolish passion for order, getting everything to *fit*, would be all wrong for anyone who wants to write poetry. You're bound to have to fix things a little if you insist on order, just as 'social *orders*' have to use 'propaganda'" (qtd. in Quinn 273). Comparable to the Bishop's idea of a "geographical mirror" in "At the Fishhouses" that simultaneously reveals and blurs the boundaries between human and nature, the poem portrays a kind of collective dream in which psyche and artificial environment reflect and bleed into one another. Bishop's assertion that "'social *orders*' have to use 'propaganda'" in order to simplify and control a diverse population highlights intoxication's allegorical overlaps with distortion, advertising, and propaganda. Recalling Marson's criticism of simplistic advertising narratives of

Jamaica in her acrostic poem, the first stanza conveys a scene of corruption and deceit obscured by the barroom's strings of lights, festive decorations, and juke-box music:

> Easily through the darkened room
> the juke-box burns; the music falls.
> Starlight, La Conga, all the dance-halls
> in the block of honkey-tonks,
> cavities in our waning moon,
> strung with bottles and blue lights
> and silvered coconuts and conches.
>
> blue as gas,
> blue as the pupil
> of a blind man's eye

Recalling the dialogic relationship between the two columns of text in "Jeronimo's House," the short cluster of text across from the poem's first three lines, "blue as gas, / blue as the pupil / of a blind man's eye" can be read as a self-contained stanza and a textual island off the poem's narrative "mainland." Bishop often wrote alternative lines for poems in the right margin of her drafts, so this short cluster of lines may simply reflect her deliberation on possible revisions to the first stanza. Although any inferences regarding her intentions with these three short lines can only be speculative, it is also possible that she is using textual space to create an ambiguous subtext similar to her use of two textual columns in "Jeronimo's House." The third lines in particular, "all the dance halls / of a blind man's eye," juxtapose entertainment and blindness, recalling the contrast in "Key West" between the festivities of the carnival and blacked out awareness of past and present violence. The idea of sightlessness introduced in the poem's opening images of a "darkened room" and "blind man's eye," converges with the idea of decay signaled by the comparison of barrooms and dancehalls to "cavities in our waning moon."[118] The cluster of three short lines conjures the filmy "vulture eye" of the murder victim in Edgar Allen Poe's "A Tell-Tale Heart." Like Poe's psychotic narrator in "The Tale-Tell Heart," who tries to

[118] Bishop's line, "cavities in our waning moon" is reminiscent of the moon that "rattles like a fragment of angry candy" in E.E. Cummings's poem "the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls," in which he castigates a group of bourgeois white women for their smug complacency. If this image in Bishop's poem is a direct allusion to that poem, it may be a reference to the general idea of a narrow perspective that misses the big picture.

convince himself and his listeners that his homicidal actions are rational, the drinking environment, as portrayed in the poem, misrepresents itself as a sane and ethnical space.

If the jukebox is an allegorical propaganda machine, its modus operandi is manipulation through vertiginous distortion.[119] Like the high-diver at the carnival who "falls / like a wagon of war against the gutted stucco walls," the jukebox and its music are synonymous with burning and falling. The barroom's falling, "burning box" similarly conjures images of drunken blackouts and weaponry. Read in the context of global propagandist excess during and leading up to World War II, the bar's patrons, drinking and dancing in unison, are suggestive of hypnotic subjects receiving war propaganda, conditioned by mechanics of persuasion. Like the distorting babble of imperialist rhetoric in Marson's "At the Prison Gates," the poem's allegorical drunkenness creates a sense of vertigo associated with distorted reality:

> As easily as the music falls,
> the nickels fall into the slots,
> the drinks like lonely water-falls
> in night descend the separate throats,
> and the hands fall on one another
> [down] darker darkness under
> tablecloths and all descends,
> descends, falls,—much as we envision
> the helpless earthward fall of love
> descending from the head and eye
> down to the hands, and heart, and down.
> The music pretends to laugh and weep
> while it descends to drink and murder.
> The burning box can keep the measure
> strict, always, and the down-beat.

Repeated images of downward motion throughout the second stanza—"falls" appears six times, and "descend[ing]" appears four times— reinforce the idea of drunkenness. Furthermore, three-fourths of the stanza are one complete grammatical thought, accelerating the text's pace and

[119] For discussions pertaining to vertigo in other poems by Bishop inspired by Surrealism and Darwin, see Rosenbaum, "Bishop and the Natural World" (76) and Travisano, 43-45, and 184-188.

enhancing the sense of vertigo. Eliciting the image of a Conga formation, the juke-box, guardian of "the down-beat," must "keep the measure / strict." The Conga, a marching line dance usually in the form of a circle, reinforces the sense of vertigo, a condition known to alter the afflicted person's visual perception of reality through spiral-like distortions. As an allegorical machine of social control, the juke-box corresponds with the figure of a slot machine portrayed in another of Bishop's unpublished poems, titled "The Soldier and the Slot-Machine," in which the slot machine is compared to a sociopathic "general" (36) whose "notions all are preconceived" (25) in its "metal heart" (28) and "metal brain" (29). A drunken soldier, whom Bishop implicitly compares to the "dummy coins" (12) fed into the slot machine, mistakenly believes the "slot machine is who is drunk" (23, 44) when it is he who is misguided by the wartime propaganda it represents. Bishop spells out the allegorical significance of the slot machine in that poem, remarking on the "dummy coins," "They are symbolic of the whole" (17). "Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box" similarly reflects Bishop's preoccupation with persuasive strategies to appeal to people's libidinal impulses; but like the slot machine, the allegorical meaning of the jukebox extends beyond consumer behavior to encompass larger systemic mechanics of persuasion, such as military recruitment and wartime propaganda.

As underscored by the poem's title, "Edgar Allen Poe & the Juke-Box" reflects Bishop's interest in the gothic mode, a subgenre characterized by themes of death, madness, secrecy, and decay. Similar to elements of the grotesque in her portrayal of Carnival in "Key West," her poem about the jukebox alludes to collectively escalating madness, murderous impulses, and submerged histories that create a sense of horror. The jukebox's allegorical significance as a symbol of social control further aligns the poem with the heavily allegorical style of the gothic genre—as typified in Poe's works—whose environmental descriptions symbolically correspond

with crises at the societal or individual psychic level. Unlike Poe's method of aligning gothic symbols with specific psychological and social conflicts, however, Bishop employs a palimpsestic method that brings suppressed, but multilayered, dynamics to the surface without fully disentangling them. In the poem's final stanza, Bishop takes up Poe's argument that effective poetic and fictive language always precisely depicts content; when the subject of a poem, systemic propaganda for example, obtains mechanical responses through careful manipulation, that subject eludes exact description due to its distorting nature:

> Poe said that poetry was *exact*.
> But pleasures are mechanical
> and know beforehand what they want
> and know exactly what they want.
> Do they obtain that single effect
> that can be calculated like alcohol
> or like the response to the nickel?
> —how long does the music burn?
> like poetry, or all your horror
> half as exact as horror here?

In the context of persuasive strategies used in propaganda, Bishop indicates there is a strong distinction between exact motives and exact discernment of them. Antagonists and their motives in horror fiction's murderous tales of suspense, a genre consumed (not unlike alcohol) for escapist pleasure, are far more dualistically transparent than systemic evil's horrors of the everyday. The elusiveness of the jukebox propaganda's source, like the palimpsestic layers of colonial and racial violence intimated in "Key West," renounces simplistic interpretation.

A cross-comparison of Bishop's and Marson's poetry reveals their similar perspectives on the deep histories that continually surface in the modern circumCaribbean. Like the excavated scroll of an ancient palimpsest, rife with erased and overwritten accounts, their poetry interjects fragments of suppressed narratives into touristic and imperialist representations of national cohesion. In their poetic treatments of Caribbean islands, they both notably create spatial

juxtaposition, incorporate dialogic subtexts, and convey irony using conventional forms that encrypt anti-colonial narratives. If landscapes are the nerve center for personal and collective memories, the mutability of colonial spaces in Marson's and Bishop's poetry suggests they are also scar tissues of hybrid identity, social fracture, and discordant histories.

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