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Claude McKay and the Transnational Novel

Bairbre Anne Patricia Walsh

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the National University of Ireland, University College Cork

Research conducted in the School of English, University College Cork, under the supervision of Dr. Lee M. Jenkins

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Table of Contents

Abstract 1

Introduction: Claude McKay: Vagabond of the Black Atlantic.....2

Chapter One: *Home to Harlem* (1928).....26

Chapter Two: *Banjo* (1929) 100

Chapter Three: *Banana Bottom* (1933).....174

Conclusion: *Gingertown* (1932).....261

Works Cited 284

Works Consulted.....302

Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere.

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Abstract

This thesis considers the three works of fiction of the Jamaican author Claude McKay (1889-1948) as a coherent *transnational* trilogy which dramatises the semi-autobiographical complexities of diasporic exile and return in the period of the 1920s and 1930s.

Chapter One explores McKay's urban North American novel, *Home to Harlem* (1928). I suggest that we need to 'reworld' conceptions of McKay's writing in order to release him from his canonical confinement in the Harlem Renaissance. Querying the problematics of the city space, of sexuality and of race as they emerge in the novel, this chapter considers McKay's percipient understanding of the need to reconfigure diasporic identity beyond the limits set by American nationalism.

Chapter Two engages with McKay's novel of portside Marseilles, *Banjo* (1929), and considers the homosocial interactions of the vagabond collective. A comparison of North America and France as supposed exemplars of individual liberty highlights the unsuitability of nationalistic prerogatives to an internally diverse black diaspora. Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic construct provides a suggestive space in which to re-imagine the possibilities of affiliation in the port. The latter section of the chapter examines McKay's particular influence on, and relationship, to the Négritude movement and Pan-African philosophies.

Chapter Three focuses on McKay's third novel, *Banana Bottom* (1933). I suggest here that the three novels comprise a coherent New World Trilogy comparable to Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite's trilogy, *The Arrivants.* This chapter considers both the Caribbean and the transnational dimensions to McKay's work.

Introduction

Claude McKay: Vagabond of the Black Atlantic

Introduction

"Jamaican," "West Indian," "African American," "colonial," "internationalist," "poet" and "vagabond" are just some of the monikers used to describe and account for the identity and perpetual wandering of the Caribbean-born author and poet, Claude McKay (1889-1948). This thesis analyses McKay's three novels, *Home to Harlem* (1928), *Banjo* (1929) and *Banana Bottom* (1933), assessing their delineation of the transnational qualities of marginal loci, which, I argue, is exemplified in his novels of Harlem, portside Marseilles and Jamaica. Written decades before the post-colonial mass migrations from the Caribbean islands, McKay's reflections on the opportunities provided by mobility and marginality for the cultivation of diasporic bonds and for the establishment of communities of the dispossessed is the pivot around which this thesis moves. Anticipating Homi Bhabha's analysis of "in-between' spaces" which "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself," McKay nourishes his multi-national collectives with this possibility of group re-identification in typically 'in-between' sites (2). This core feature of McKay's fictional and, importantly, autobiographical writing accommodates a suggestive alliance with a wealth of contemporary theoretical paradigms which shift productively but imperfectly around the fictional texts and their quintessentially ambivalent author. Paul Gilroy and his theory of the Black Atlantic is essential to the consideration of the seafaring narrative, *Banjo*, in Chapter Two. Gilroy speaks indirectly to McKay, and indeed to the engagement of this thesis with McKay's rendering of liminal spaces, when he suggests that the "critical space/time cartography of the diaspora needs . . . to be readjusted so that the dynamics of

dispersal and local autonomy can be shown alongside unforeseen detours and circuits which mark the new journeys and new arrivals that, in turn, release new political and cultural possibilities" (*The Black Atlantic* 86).

This thesis' consideration of transnationalism in McKay's writing draws on the intertextual nature of his fictional and autobiographic writing, where 'the dynamics of dispersal and local autonomy' and a myriad 'detours and circuits' are most vividly illustrated.[1] Both of McKay's autobiographies, *A Long Way From Home,* published in 1937, and the posthumously published *My Green Hills of Jamaica* (1979), highlight the arc of transnationalism which frames McKay's literary career; his personal philosophies and a broader, collective, experience of global mobility are densely interwoven into the plot of his three narratives of exile. Pursuing the impact of his actual vagabondage on his literary rendering of black modernist mobilities demands consideration of the role of migrancy and masculinity in the collectives McKay creates from memory and from imagination.

The interconnectivity of gender, sexuality and mobility challenges the assumptions of the reader when these three novels are read in the generic terms of a trilogy. I offer a close textual analysis of McKay's three works of fiction,

[1] Although writing of the impact of globalisation (in all its current guises) on contemporary intellectual inquiry, Judie Newman's description of its effect on the humanities benefits this thesis' understanding of transnationalism in the writing of McKay. Newman writes:

> In literary studies, the recognition that the object of knowledge is situated in a vast network of intertextual and intercultural relationships has prompted fresh exploration of 'transnational' writers; the remapping of literary periods, influences and areas; and consideration of the connections between national literatures and postcolonial studies, border studies, diasporic culture and even scientific models. (2-3)

considering them as a coherent *transnational* trilogy of exile, mobility, migration and return. Though seemingly unconventional in terms of the traditional narrative expectations of trilogy (there is a significant change in characterisation and location between the first two novels and *Banana Bottom)* these novels provide a rich and provocative 'New World Trilogy' which both pre-visions and contributes, as discussed in Chapter Three, to Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite's poetic trilogy of origin and return in *The Arrivants.* McKay's movement from Harlem to Marseilles and on to Jamaica in his novels deforms the reality of unfulfilled return to the homeland as experienced by McKay himself; this trilogy thus informs our understanding of the resonances of home. Reading the trilogy in this way allows us to re-evaluate McKay, to see him as the subject and as a recorder of transnational black modernity. Seeking to unite the seemingly disparate contexts, characters, themes and preoccupations of the three novels, the concept of an imperfect trilogy is posited as a way of understanding McKay's three works of fiction, and to suggest the connections rather than the many and obvious differences between the urban novels, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, and the rural *Banana Bottom.*

The difficulties of locating McKay canonically are addressed by this thesis, which seeks to reposition him beyond the geopolitical confines of the Harlem Renaissance, where he is most frequently understood to 'fit'; this thesis seeks to expand the definition of the cultural movement which has often been misappropriated by a limited understanding of its boundaries. This study places him both within and beyond the hydrosphere of the Black Atlantic, and suggests that he transcends, too, an essentialist understanding of Caribbean or West Indian literary identity. Key to this understanding of McKay is my contention that his life and fictional writing epitomise a transnational understanding of identity and that his fiction discloses a

preference for the inclusivity propounded by such an ideology. Avoiding 'locatedness' is a key facet of McKay's vision, and he pre-empts Donald Pease's recent critique of national literatures in his aesthetic of transnationalism: "National narratives were structured in the (metanarrative) desire (intentionality) to recover a lost national origin whose projection onto a national future organized an individual quest in the form of a sequence of purposive events (national narrativity)" ("National Narratives, Postnational Narration" 4). Exploring, and even helping to instantiate the modern trope of transnationalism, McKay's novels thus resist any drive towards the literary creation of an exclusive 'national future'; instead his novels can be seen actively to pursue multiple narratives and identities and the explicit repudiation of the type of single-minded vision elucidated by Pease. Instead, McKay 'quests' for a broad range of futures which more sensitively engage with the global experiences of displacement and trauma that stem from a New World African diasporan past. Pease outlines the ways in which 'national' texts have "organized collective representations of the national people, transmitted the official scenarios wherein individuals were subjectivized as its citizen subjects, and controlled the individual citizen's relation to the state" ("National Narratives, Postnational Narration" 5). McKay presents a world where there is little hegemony, and even less sense of national citizenship. In his transnational and 'motley' community and his New World Trilogy, he transcends the limits attached to the national narrative.

Troubling the diasporic liberty of McKay's trilogy is his defiantly masculinist gendering of the exilic experience. His vagabond alliances in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* are emphatically homosocial in their specific cultivation of male only relationships which carry an undercurrent of the homoerotic. Discourse surrounding diaspora is frequently gendered in its privileging of the male peripatetic experience;

paradoxically, however, it is productive to read McKay's ambivalent and homosocial picaresque novels, and the more conventional *Banana Bottom,* in the light of feminist spatial and postcolonial theories. In this thesis, the theoretical framework of theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Caren Kaplan, Inderpal Grewal and Susan Stanford Friedman, and the fictional writing of Jean Rhys, contribute to a re-imagining of the possibilities of minority migration in McKay's fiction. Conceptualising mobile aspects of McKay's writing within feminist constructs of transnationalism permits a greater comprehension of the impact of migration on minority collectives, with a particular emphasis on gender roles and gendered interaction. If McKay's novels adopt an often chauvinistic male viewpoint, this can be understood as ideological in function; McKay bids to reconstruct a fractured African masculinity in a transnational sphere, and the rejection of developed female characters indicates the complexities of heterosexual relationships and familial structures in the wake of global African dislocation. But, even as he locates cultural strength in the (male) minority group life of Harlem and Marseilles, McKay pre-empts certain components of the transnational feminism of, for example, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.*

In *Banjo,* McKay creates an identity for his male vagabonds comparable to that of the "new mestiza," imagined in the geographically distant loci of Harlem and the French 'borderland' of Marseilles, and in the masculinist seafaring context (Anzaldúa 101). Anzaldúa suggests that the mestiza "has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, . . . that juncture where the mestiza stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs" (101). The locating of cultural productivity and rejuvenated unity in the figure of the mestiza resonates with

McKay's transnational vagabond assembly. Considering McKay's writing as proleptic, in respects, of later postcolonial paradigms such as Anzaldúa's serves to emphasise his early participation in a global awakening to the situation of colonised, marginalised and oppressed minority collectives who are enriched by their experiences of their loci of complex encounters.

While informed by recent publications pertaining to McKay's poetic oeuvre, this thesis engages exclusively with his fiction, his autobiographies, his documentary of Harlem—*Harlem: Negro Metropolis*—and his collection of short stories, *Gingertown.* Extending the dominant critical discourse on McKay, I seek here to consider McKay at a remove from the Harlem Renaissance, and to embrace his three works of fiction as a trilogy. Wayne F. Cooper's seminal biography, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance,* is an invaluable resource for McKay studies, and the starting point in my own research. William J. Maxwell's recent editorship of the long overdue *Claude McKay: Complete Poems* provides access to the full wealth of both McKay's dialect poetry and his Standard English verse, revealing the contemporary demand for comprehensive access to this body of work, and reflecting his growing reputation as a poet. Winston James' *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice: Claude McKay's Jamaican Poetry of Rebellion* meticulously explores the Caribbean context of McKay's dialect poetry, while Louis James' *Caribbean Literature in English* concentrates on McKay's poetic career, specifically his use of Creole, and makes reference also to the "Jamaican" novel, *Banana Bottom*. There is, perhaps, in the selective focus of the kind that inevitably attends area studies like James', a suggestion that texts by the Jamaican author about Harlem or Marseilles are less 'Caribbean,' despite their author's origin. Cognisant of the tensions in McKay's writing between concepts of 'home' and the realities of exile, James' lack

of engagement with the two urban texts, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo,* is perhaps more provocative than if they were included. Such exclusion raises important issues, addressed in this thesis, about the multi-locational writing of the Jamaican McKay. Crucially, however, James does indicate the global relevance of McKay, as poet and as author, in his Postscript: "Black consciousness in the United States found its catalyst in the writing of a Jamaican, Marcus Garvey, and the movement drew inspiration from a lengthy roster of eminent West Indians, including Claude McKay, Eric Walrond, Richard B. Moore, and Walter Adolphe Roberts" (*Caribbean Literature* 211).

Intercultural encounter is of central relevance to recent evaluations of McKay. Peter D. O' Neill and David Lloyd's *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* highlights the relevance of Ireland and Britain in the evolution of a black cultural aesthetic, and specifically of the role of Ireland in this 'triangle.' The 'mission statement' for their collection, is "to document 'points of contact, overlap and cooperation'—as well as competition and exploitation—across the Atlantic" (xvi). This thesis seeks to continue and extend such a dialogue. Lee. M Jenkins' chapter, "Beyond the Pale: Green and Black and Cork," accounts for the presence in, and affiliation with, Ireland and Britain of Frederick Douglass, Olaudah Equiano, Claude McKay and others. My analysis of Harlem, of port-side Marseilles and of Jamaica is complementary in its approach to the interconnectivity of—perhaps unexpected—loci in the Black Atlantic.

Heather Hathaway devotes two chapters in her book, *Caribbean Waves: Relocating Claude McKay and Paule Marshall,* to a consideration of the impact of Caribbean identity in the American context on McKay's poetry and novels, which is also an essential component of my study of McKay. Hathaway emphasises the

necessity to 'reexamine' McKay "in light of his experiences as a migrant, as a black (im)migrant, and as a British Caribbeaner" since this "illuminates facets of his writings that have been previously misinterpreted or misunderstood due to the tradition of locating McKay within the restrictive categories of 'African American' or 'West Indian' literature" (53). Hathaway speaks to the goals of this thesis. However, this dissertation also engages with a New Modernist approach to McKay, which releases him from the limiting categories suggested by Hathaway. Her attention is focused on the political dimension of *Home to Harlem,* along with depictions of female sexuality. Her discussion of *Banjo* privileges the imbrication of nationalism and capitalism, while again reflecting on the role of women; Hathaway credits the female figure of Latnah in the novel with an independence this thesis contests, but which Hathaway also tempers, acknowledging that "perhaps only in a non-nationalist, non-capitalist, utopian realm like the beach can individuals live by and be recognized for their merits" (73). Finally, Hathaway's analysis of *Banana Bottom,* which queries the merits of the novel, emphasises the differences between it and the previous two novels, conceiving of the third text as "a shift in his aesthetic agenda" (74).[2] Hathaway is right to comment that "his final novel reinforces just how distant from Jamaica he had become"; nonetheless, I argue that the book comports with the other novels in comprising a transnational trilogy (75). In a similar focus, Brent Hayes Edwards' chapter "Vagabond Internationalism: Claude McKay's *Banjo*" in his *The Practice of Diaspora* has been an invaluable source of

[2] Hathaway writes that McKay's rendering of the peasant community of his birth in *Banana Bottom* is "doomed to failure" specifically because of his exile; I suggest the depiction of his childhood Jamaica must be read as another instalment in a transnational trilogy, thus emphasising the implications of the illustration, rather than the success of it (83).

my understanding of the role of mobility in McKay's fiction, while simultaneously pushing me to question how the often overlooked *Banana Bottom* may be read in conjunction with, and not as a departure from, the concerns and preoccupations of *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo.*

Jenkins' *The Language of Caribbean Poetry: Boundaries of Expression* provides an in-depth study of the complexities of McKay's use of language and register in his poetry and facilitates an understanding of the implications of the use of dialect. By extension, Jenkins' study stimulates an awareness of the role of 'the vernacular and Standard English'—to borrow from the title of the chapter on McKay in her book—in his fictions also. Michael North's *The Dialect of Modernism* offers what is perhaps the definitive reading of McKay's dialect poetry, and is the foundation for reflections on McKay which imbricate mobility and language. North's querying of McKay's position in relation to canonical modernism stimulates the debate in this thesis about the limitations of canons for understanding McKay. As North proposes:

> The arc of his career suggests, at first glance, that the expatriate writers of all modern communities share a single experience: like Pound and Eliot he was schooled in a standardized English from which he broke away; like them he rebelled by linking his language to jazz; and his jazziest novel, *Home to Harlem*, appeared at about the same time as *Sweeney Agonistes*. Yet the differences are even more apparent. For one thing, the career arcs are hardly the same at all: for the white modernists, early struggle finally issued in stability, success, and honor, even for Ezra Pound. McKay's early success dissolved with the notoriety of Harlem, and he ended life a forgotten pauper. (122)

Michelle A. Stephens' exploration of *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* as exemplars of the black modernist search for self-determination in her *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962,* is equally suggestive, as it frames McKay in a world of conflicting and aggressive nationalisms and transgressive sexualities: "*Banjo* reveals the ways in which empire polices the practice of alternative forms of mobility and sexuality, the black males 'freedom in flight' and 'freedom to love' outside the paradigms and narratives of the nation-state" (203). Building on Stephens' rich and instrumental text while also problematising her reading of black internationalism, my analysis of McKay extends to *Banana Bottom,* which necessarily involves reading his works beyond the limits of mobile male transnationalism and female stasis as represented in his urban novels. This thesis is committed to an engagement with all three novels as a coherent transnational New World trilogy which repositions McKay even further beyond the specific locations of 'empire' explored by Stephens. Bridging the significant divide between women and men posited in *Black Empire*, this thesis also seeks to promote McKay's personal sensitivity to the interconnected experiences of racial minorities and marginalised female voices, as expressed in his 1937 autobiography, *A Long Way From Home:* "Many years ago I preserved a brief editorial from the *Nation* on the Woman's Party which seemed to me to be perfectly applicable to the position of the Negro—if the word Negro were substituted for 'woman' and 'whites' for men" (353).

The methodology of this thesis synthesises the approaches of the New Harlem Renaissance studies, Diaspora theory, post-colonial studies, Caribbean theory and paradigms of transnationalism. Too often, African American and African Caribbean artistic movements have been subsumed into the catch-all category of the Harlem

Renaissance, rather than being evaluated on their own terms as a fertile starting point from which to trace the transnational evolution of black diasporan culture. This thesis thus seeks to creatively complicate an understanding of the multiple identities and encounters central to diasporic fictions like those of McKay.

The tripartite structure of this thesis was devised deliberately to replicate and engage with McKay's trilogy. Each chapter enters into a dialogue with those theories which have proved applicable to a transnational understanding of his fiction. As I will briefly outline in summaries of the three chapters, McKay's fictions are frequently pre-emptive of and consistently illuminated by current concepts which have defined the transnational quality of diaspora evoked in his writing. My research also seeks to expand current notions of the American modernist tradition, reading the diasporic literature of the 1920s and 1930s in an extended transnational context.

McKay strains against theoretical frameworks, and yet this is, perhaps, the key to understanding him as the ultimate figure of marginality and, as such, an exemplar of a re-worked and re-imagined Black Atlantic aesthetic which expands to 'fit' his mobile and strenuously restless philosophy of a 'New World African' diaspora. Relinquishing the notion that a single paradigm could accommodate a discussion of McKay facilitated a comparative methodology, and opened up this thesis to the possibilities of multiple axes of transnationalism and Atlantic mobility. As O'Neill and Lloyd suggest: "the introduction of the comparative dimension that an Atlanticist perspective necessarily entails complicated matters in ways that exceeded the mere accumulation of materials or encounters" (xvi). While far from exhaustive or definitive, this thesis hopes to present something of the diversity and percipience of McKay's own fiction.

My use of the term 'picaresque' to describe *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* draws on the following definition by Richard Bjornson, which relates to the historical evolution of the Spanish and European picaresque novel from the 1500s onward, yet nonetheless speaks, if indirectly, to McKay's urban fictions. Bjornson proposes that the term *picaresque* "is usually employed to describe episodic, open-ended narratives in which lower-class protagonists sustain themselves by means of their cleverness and adaptability during an extended journey through space, time, and various predominantly corrupt social milieux" (4). The applicability of such a term to McKay's first two novels in the transnational trilogy further indicates how relevant his novels are to a reconstructed 'modern' canon. The connection between the centrality of the picaresque tradition and the liminality of the diasporic voice indicates the possibilities of a reconfigured modern tradition. This thesis' understanding of the role and implications of the 'pícaro'[3] is informed by Bjornson's character portrait:

> Variously described as a social conformist in avid pursuit of material possessions and a rebel who rejects society and its rewards . . . a good for nothing without scruples and a wanderer with potentialities of sainthood, he has been called immoral, amoral, and highly moral. In actuality, picaresque heroes have at one time or another exhibited all these and many other characteristics; their fictional lives have served

[3] The 'pícaro' is, of course, the Spanish spelling, and the one employed by Bjornson as the original term. For the rest of the thesis however, I will use the anglicised 'picaro' to suggest McKay's particular engagement with the genre, which is not tied to place or language, but is re-created in his adoption of the term for his transnational fictions.

> as vehicles for the expression of diametrically opposed ideologies and moral systems. (5)

My analysis is sensitive to the different representations of the picaro throughout the two novels of vagabondage, and is also reflective of the multiplicity of identities available to the wandering diaspora in McKay's writing and his lived experience. Undeniably, that lived experience is also communicated in a realist mode—much of the migrancy in both urban novels is stimulated by an absolute economic imperative. The adoption of elements of the picaresque form permits McKay to endorse, through his fictional surrogates, the numerous 'ideologies and moral systems' with which he engaged intellectually, while challenging such fixed features of the form such as the omnipresent first person narrator of the traditional picaresque with his third person omniscient narrator in both *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo.* Once again, McKay is pushing the boundaries of narrative as he deconstructs the forms of the picaresque, the realist and modernist text.

Christine J. Whitbourn's *Knaves and Swindlers: Essays on the Picaresque Novel in Europe* suggests the "moral ambiguity" of the picaro historically (1). Typically, McKay chooses selectively to engage with a narrative tradition laden with ambivalence. Whitbourn writes: "an element of moral ambiguity has existed in the Spanish picaresque tradition from earliest times and, continuing throughout the Golden Age, constitutes one of its major points of interest and its principal sources of strength" (1). Her study unravels the opposing depictions of the picaro which highlight either his trickster qualities, which are used for the acquisition of material gains at the expensive of others, or those picaros who have "a strong consciousness of right and wrong" (7). This inherent instability of character is identifiable in both *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*. McKay's cultivation of these very ambiguities again

suggests his engagement with and subversion of Western canonical formulations, as he appropriates and bends to his own needs the established conventions of the picaresque tradition.

Archival Work

Supported from October 2009 by a Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, I was fortunate to be able to spend a short time in both the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library[4] in Yale in April 2010. This research trip provided me with the opportunity to experience first-hand the valuable archival material pertaining to McKay. This empirical research was foundational, contributing in many ways to the evolution of my apprehension of McKay's oeuvre, as I was exposed to personal letters, original manuscripts, images and, what was particularly striking in the light of this study of McKay's transnational identity, his British passport. Visiting Harlem, Marseilles and Nice in 2010 enhanced my appreciation of McKay's loci, and the fact of the erosion

[4] I accessed part of the James Weldon Johnson Collection while in Yale which contains the vast collection of materials relating to McKay, and was notably initiated by Carl Van Vechten, author of the infamous *Nigger Heaven.* Kathleen Pfeiffer notes in her introduction to *Nigger Heaven*:

> Van Vechten's most impressive contribution to African American scholarship was his founding of—and tireless work toward—a memorial collection of African American arts and letters at Yale, named for James Weldon Johnson. Van Vechten's dedication to honouring the memory of his dear friend led the inveterate collector to donate his own personal corpus of materials relating to black arts and letters, and his considerable library formed the core of what has since become one of the country's most important collections. (xxxii-xxxiii)

of the Vieux Port in Marseilles in World War Two leant a particular significance to McKay's *Banjo* as a historical document.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter One engages with McKay's urban American novel, *Home to Harlem*, and considers the experience of the socio-culturally marginal inhabitants of the cityscape of Harlem. Committed to the communication of the experience of the racially heterogeneous populace of Harlem, McKay depicts a diasporic community constantly struggling to survive and to claim a distinct identity in the face of the dominance of WASP America. Employing the contemporary theory of John Muthyala, I suggest that McKay was an early advocate of "reworlding America," to borrow from Muthyala's title, as he consciously sought to transcend the limiting categories of identity prescribed by a narrowly conceived American nationalism. Muthyala's notion of a 'reworlded identity' allows for McKay's transgressive sexuality, the ethnic diversity and the migratory lifestyle to exist as a valid transnational identity, and serves, therefore, to remind us of the need to reconsider the ways in which McKay has previously been categorised.

McKay suggests the possibility of a distinct black counter-cultural identity in Harlem.[5] Subverting the negative connotations of the periphery, this becomes something to be cultivated for its wealth and internal diversity and for the beneficial role of migration both into and out of the community. Rather than a black appeal for segregation or a betrayal of middle-class black America, as it was so frequently branded, *Home to Harlem* is here conceived as McKay's attempt, albeit a problematic one, to represent a valid and contestatory vision of black life in

[5] Notably, *Home to Harlem* was written while McKay was out of the U.S., in France.

America; characterised by cultural productivity and intercultural encounter, the minority in Harlem resist the limits of borders and boundaries. Key to this thesis is the desire "to move beyond the national" which, as Alan Rice insists, "does not mean a descent into abstractions, as ideas such as the transnational, the diasporic and the oceanic provide equally rigorous geographies of analysis" (*Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* 23).

Considering the issue of McKay's ambivalent place both 'inside' and 'outside' the Harlem Renaissance, Chapter One begins a dialogue which the subsequent chapters continue, as it strives to relocate McKay in an expanded, transnational canon which acknowledges his Jamaican identity, but which also allows for the profound effect of his personal peripatetic lifestyle on conceptions of that identity. The role of movement within the United States depicted in *Home to Harlem* signifies the beginning of his study of the opportunities provided by mobility for the enhancement of black cultural identity, an issue which is pursued in Chapters Two and Three.

A comparative reading of *Home to Harlem* and Wallace Thurman's *Infants of the Spring* explores the nature of class, sexuality, race, 'colour-consciousness,' and exile as depicted in and by the texts, and facilitates Chapter One's consideration of both the complexities of a transnational American novel, and a transnational black artistic aesthetic. I will seek to relocate these writers who resisted cultural hegemony in the specific urban American context of Harlem, and thus emphasise the international and multi-faceted belongings of 'American' writing. McKay's early creation of the transnational novel, a category included in globalised conceptions of contemporary American Studies, suggests that he recognised the need for the kind of fluid sense of identity which weighs so profoundly on modern definitions of 'the self.' My

comparative analysis of McKay and Thurman serves to question the viability of America as a locus for a union of international voices and how, paradoxically, it often functioned as a site of defamiliarisation for the exile. In very different ways, McKay and Thurman also advocate flight from and abandonment of the American locus if individual and collective identity is to be realised. These necessary departures raise the issue of the possibility and sustainability of a marginal cultural aesthetic in the U.S., but outside mainstream American culture.

A consideration of McKay's engagement with global political movements, in particular Socialism and Communism, serves to conclude Chapter One, and open up the thesis to the discussion, continued in Chapter Two, of his increasing awareness of the conditions and values of the New World African diaspora.

Chapter Two examines the many ways in which *Banjo* extols a type of black internationalism unavailable in Harlem. I will highlight how temporal and geographic locations remove McKay from the more limited conception of the context of the Harlem Renaissance, and consider the ways in which his movement to Europe for his second novel signifies the transnational complexity of his oeuvre. Via *Banjo* I will engage in a comparative study of American and European conceptions of exile, which I argue is also a way to expand contemporary parameters of American Studies. Using a transnational framework, I will explore dislocation in, and beyond, McKay's *Banjo*. I employ the cultural concepts of Pan-Africanism and Négritude, highlighting both as motive forces behind the quest for a black transnational identity in the 1920s. This entails a historical analysis of the inability of America to support an exiled and multinational black populace. In this respect, a contrast may be drawn between the U.S. and France in the 1920s.

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* is a core theoretical text for my reading of *Banjo,* as he proposes a notion of black national identity which connects through ideology rather than location. McKay pre-visions but also reimagines elements of Gilroy's paradigm, and this chapter will seek to demonstrate the ways in which *Banjo* exemplifies those 'in-between' sites of encounter elucidated by Gilroy, but proleptically challenges his notion of seascape by locating his vagabond collective in the port. Theories of the Black Atlantic are imperfect but suggestive frameworks for understanding McKay, who avoids explicit engagement with the resonances of the slave trade in his decision to locate his seafaring collective on dry land, and as such subverts the negative undercurrent which is, by necessity, central to Gilroy's construct. Alan Rice attributes a similar and contemporary re-imaging of the horrors of the slave trade to the visual artist Ellen Gallagher, as she defies the finality of the slaves' death when cast overboard the slaver, and signifies the "Aquatopia" that is Drexciya in her art. [6] This endowment of spaces of horror with positive potential resonates in *Banjo,* and is key to understanding McKay's cultivation of diasporic communities in the port, which although not weighed down by the negative connotations of the sea, certainly were sites of continued torture for the slave

[6] Drexciya, Rice explains, was

> developed by the Detroit-techno protagonist James Stinson and his compatriots, whose musical output envisaged a watery Atlantis-like utopia populated by African descendants. . . . This mythical civilisation had been created, not by the drowned Africans themselves, but . . . by the embryos of the pregnant women who had committed suicide or been murdered in the middle passage. These 'water-breathing' descendants of Africans 'had ejected themselves from the womb, adapted gills and built a civilisation beneath the Atlantic, an Aquatopia . . . known as Drexciya'. (*Creating Memorials* 191)

(*Creating Memorials* 190-1). In Rice's suggestion that "Gallagher transmogrifies this hitherto alien space into a utopian aquatic world where African subjects have developed the ability to live, breathe and make culture," we can draw parallels with McKay's figuring of cultural productivity in the French port of Marseilles (*Creating Memorials* 192). Arguably McKay also pre-empts ideas of re-imagination and re-interpretation forwarded by James Stinson and Gerald Donald of the musical collaboration, Drexciya, and of the art of Gallagher in the contemporary realm which Rice discusses (*Creating Memorials* 192). These ideas allow a consideration, continued from Chapter One's reflection on the role of the city in *Home to Harlem*, of the implications of the port in the novel, as it extends and epitomises the qualities of liminality of Harlem to accommodate intercultural encounter and cultural productivity, which redeems the residual negativity of the port.

Detailed studies of both Pan-Africanism and Négritude in Chapter Two will seek to show McKay's important and strategic role in a black socio-cultural continuum of thought. [7] McKay, in effect, invents his own version of Pan-Africanism, and with his second novel he certainly stimulated the transnational dimension of the Négritude movement. The role of *Banjo* in French and Francophone Caribbean intellectual life has been documented elsewhere, yet I consider here the implications of McKay's transnationalist philosophy on movements which are both traditionally tied rigidly to

[7] I write 'Négritude' throughout this thesis with both a capital 'N' to connote the movement as a recognised moment in black cultural discourse, and also with an accent over the 'e', to employ the French spelling of the word, rather than the anglicised 'Negritude.' I decided to do this having read Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal,* and saw the French and English translation on parallel pages, where Césaire makes the distinction between the French (négritude) and English (negritude) and I wanted to privilege McKay's stimulation of the concept as conceived by French and Francophone Caribbean intellectuals (114-5).

the specific loci of Africa and France.[8] Again, McKay strains against ideological constructions. His fiction encourages us to consider these important cultural movements within an extended Black Atlantic continuum—to recognise, that is, the international dimensions of these philosophies.

My consideration of Pan-Africanism, and McKay's particular 'version' of it, is supported by comparative readings of the writings and rhetoric of W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey. While McKay endorses ideological black unification, I suggest that it is a less radically conceived solidarity than that proposed by, for example, the 'Back to Africa Movement,' and that McKay's vision consisted instead of a dynamic understanding of diasporic encounter in the early 20th century. A close textual analysis of Martin Delany's *Blake; or The Huts of America* first published in its entirety in serial form between 1861 and 1862 in *The Weekly Anglo-African*, provides space to consider the complex role of patriarchy, gender, and sexuality in early Pan-Africanist discourse, and provides a suggestive contrast with McKay's homosocial rendering of modern Pan-African affiliation in the French port.

An engagement with Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* and with the Négritude movement more generally underlines the role of *Banjo* in the evolution of what is now understood to be the transnational persona of the movement. Inspired also by the radical history of Haiti and Haitian Indigenism, by the Harlem Renaissance and West African cultural expression, Négritude emerges as profoundly indebted too, to McKay's specifically border-less evocation of black African, American and Caribbean mobile identities.

[8] See Michel Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980*, and Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism.*

The final chapter of this thesis considers McKay's last novel, *Banana Bottom,* in the context of trilogy. Chapter Three opens with a comparative exploration of McKay's three novels and the 1973 trilogy of Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy.* Employing Brathwaite's text to suggest the viability of McKay's work as a trilogy and as an appropriately conceived 'New World Trilogy' reflected in its implicit delineation of constant exile, I engage in an analysis which suggests the centrality of motifs of exile, movement, homecoming and African ancestry in both texts. My discussion seeks to highlight how the intersections of these themes indicate the influential role of McKay's trilogy on a developing Caribbean aesthetic, while comparing the evocation of African displacement, migration and re-settlement in both trilogies. Drawing parallels between the texts, I will also discuss the impact on McKay and Brathwaite of the divergent experiences of expatriation, taking into account the respective unrealised and realised return to the Caribbean of each writer, and allowing for the later postcolonial context of Brathwaite's creativity to weigh on my reading of his trilogy.

Engaging with a multiplicity of Caribbean voices, including those of Edouard Glissant, Brathwaite, George Lamming, Aimé Césaire, Silvio Torres-Saillant, Michael Gilkes, Jean Rhys, Gordon Rohlehr and David Dabydeen, I suggest the benefits of reading McKay through a transnational and resolutely multivalent lens while maintaining a sensitivity to his Jamaican identity, because McKay's literary outlook is so frequently in tension with specifically 'Caribbean' evocations of identity. Reading McKay cross-culturally allows the full extent of his intercultural philosophy to surface, and his persistent resistance to essentialist narratives of identity indicates his commitment to the formation of identities which prioritise movement and exchange. While there is a productive if not contemporaneous

alliance between the writing of McKay and postcolonial writers of migration and exile, I will suggest that it is McKay's pre-visioning of mobile and multiple 'selves' which, although this has often been overlooked in Caribbean literary histories, paved the way for the later rendering of diasporic narratives. Too often McKay has been excluded from Caribbean literary histories; this chapter seeks to re-establish his important place in the West Indian cultural legacy.

The issue of gender and gendered renderings of migration will be at the centre of Chapter Three, as the problematics of a female protagonist, Bita in *Banana Bottom,* in an otherwise male dominated trilogy of exile, are considered. Issues of gender are inseparable from McKay's recourse here to the conventional plot of the realist novel—a notable departure from the picaresque narratives preceding it. It is tempting to see Bita as the archetypal female nationalist muse; but such a reading is, I suggest reductive, and Bita is instead imbricated with McKay's personal quandaries of permanent exile and unending migration. Troubling readings of *Banana Bottom* as a simple narrative of female exile and successful reintegration into the domestic sphere, McKay's own unfulfilled return to the island of his birth, his decision to abandon the male protagonists of the first two novels and his residence in North Africa at the time of the third novel's conception all force a reassessment of the conventions of the novel. It is when *Banana Bottom* is read in conjunction with the first two novels, and not on its own terms, that the complications of its putative realism fully emerge.

Connected to this, the role of the land and the island context in *Banana Bottom,* its uses of pastoralism and anti-pastoralism, are complex, causing us to reassess the ways in which Bita may be connected to the rural site in McKay's evocation of return to Jamaica. McKay's own migration from the island, and his relationship with

the expatriate Englishman Walter Jekyll, are relevant here: indeed, the McKay-Jekyll friendship can be traced in the surrogate relationship of Bita and her foster mother, Mrs. Craig. Directly pertaining to this is the role of island language in the novel. I will suggest that McKay consciously exploits the value of dialect to extol the transnational and African inheritance of Jamaican folk culture, and propose that his engagement with orality, so densely woven into the narrative of *Banana Bottom*, is a significant moment of return to the language first utilised in his Jamaican dialect poetry. This will demand an engagement with some of McKay's early dialect poetry, to elucidate the interaction between the island, the individual and the community. I will also look at the role played in the novel by Obeah, suggesting it is emblematic of the resilience of African culture in the Caribbean, but that it also indicates a further transnational dimension to McKay's depiction of folk life in Jamaica.

This thesis concludes with an assessment of *Gingertown*, McKay's 1932 collection of short stories, which, I argue, operates as a microcosm of the trilogy. The stories offer multiple locations as context for narratives which are distinctly transnational in character. We can trace McKay's literary evolution through these often autobiographical stories, which indicate his increasing restlessness and his need to engage—albeit only figuratively—with the locus of his birth and the rural countryside of his memory.

Chapter One

Home to Harlem (1928)

Chapter One

"The nexus of colonial desire and imperial vision in worlding America makes reworlding America imperative. We must interrogate the maneuvers of language, discourse, history, and cultural signs and symbols that claim to produce an authentic and original national history. We must examine the processes by which particular ideas of America are given hegemonic force in order to affirm only certain ideas as quintessentially 'American'" (Muthyala 2).

If we consider Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* within the contemporary theoretical parameters of John Muthyala's transnational ideologies in *Reworlding America*, the significance of the Harlem Renaissance re-emerges as a movement attempting to forge a distinctive black transnational identity in 1920s America. Restructuring identity transnationally, I aim to reposition Claude McKay and Wallace Thurman as cultural activists who sought to evade the hegemonic ideologies of America which excluded minority identity. Muthyala proposes that the "worlding" of America by imperialist-inclined historians like Samuel P. Huntington and Niall Ferguson encourages the singular conception of American identity promoted by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant histories which are intensely class conscious, as well as racially exclusive: "while it draws the world into the realm of the cognizable by establishing zones of possibility, relation, and encounter . . . it relegates to the margins of social existence those elements that seem to threaten this process" (2). McKay's belief in the strength of the minority comports with the notion of 'reworlding' which Muthyala defines as the process of "examining the cultural, political, economic, and social processes that bring the world into America and America into the world" (2). McKay extends and transgresses the geopolitical, racial and sexual boundary and re-imagines the cultural value of marginal or minority

intercultural encounter which occurs along the divergent axes of the Black Atlantic. As Wayne Cooper suggests in his foreword to the 1987 edition of *Home to Harlem:* "McKay also expressed an appreciation of the growing importance in America and elsewhere of ethnic literatures that concentrated on the specific characteristics and experiences of particular minorities" (xiii). Cultural transnationalism thus affords "a new lens or framework for identifying processes, identities, structures, and cultures that criss-cross with those of the nation-building project" (Stephens, "Black Transnationalism" 593). Positioning McKay as a contributor to the Harlem Renaissance, but a remote participant in the movement given his absence from America from 1922 until 1934, this thesis recognises the troubling presence of McKay both inside and outside the movement. However, this ambivalence challenges received definitions of the 'Harlem' Renaissance, forcing a reconsideration of the boundaries placed around this time of global black cultural rejuvenation. McKay's personal and literary transnationalism enables an appreciation of the fluidity of the borders of the movement.

The dominant white society of the American 1920s sought to construct rigidly defined notions of American identity within narrowly defined boundaries of class, race, gender and sexuality. These are the very confines which the then un-conceptualised 'Harlem Renaissance' sought to transgress, and which the contemporary New Harlem Studies now explores and redefines. The Harlem Renaissance was a racialised movement, but also a distinctly class based moment in African American history, and in revising the literary canon it is key also to acknowledge what Sharon Jones identifies as the divisions in reception of the literature of the Renaissance based on class:

> Deconstructing the tripartite division of folk, bourgeois, and proletarian aesthetics and reconstructing this division into a whole and complete triangular configuration of aesthetics . . . leads to a greater understanding of African American literature of the Harlem Renaissance. (5)

The tendency either to laud or denounce a particular class is a common motif in criticism of the Harlem Renaissance, and an issue on which W.E.B. Du Bois and McKay clashed. Yet George Hutchinson elucidates the importance of the much derided middle class to the efforts of the Renaissance, and suggests that "those who disdain the 'bourgeois' nature of the Harlem Renaissance blind themselves to the strategic importance of middle-class contests for cultural power in the Unites States" (*The Harlem Renaissance* 13). In an increasingly capitalist and materialistic society, culture and art required the balance of talent and financial support; although abroad in Russian, Europe, and North Africa for much of the 1920s, McKay himself was known to frequently and unashamedly seek assistance from his 'bourgeois' acquaintances.[9] Yet the modernism which characterises much of the art and literature of the Renaissance found its cultural roots, unusually, in the proletariat and the folk, unlike modernisms of urban Europe, such as the mechanistic Italian Futurism of Marinetti. The dichotomy of class in the Renaissance is a central problematic for McKay. As Cooper suggests of this division:

[9] In a letter to James Ivy (the editor of the N.A.A.C.P.'s *Crisis* magazine from 1950 to 1966) in 1928, McKay wrote of the benefits received while in France: "since I have been over here I have gotten plenty of money from white admirers of myself and my poetry—sums ranging from hundred, five hundred, thousand francs through to two hundred dollars that I had at different times" (Cooper, *The Passion* 146).

> In truth, the efforts of the black middle class to guide, if not control, the New Negro movement and to keep it safely within the bounds of their own preoccupations proved impossible. . . . the youthful Langston Hughes announced to the world that his generation of black writers had passed beyond the genteel treatment of black life and intended to express their 'individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame.' (*Claude McKay* 240)

Class, race and modernism are inextricably linked in any consideration of the Harlem Renaissance. Although more recent modernist criticism extends this construction, received canonical definitions of 'modernism' allude frequently to the white 'heroes' of the movement—Pound, Joyce, Eliot: the central problematic of black exclusion from a modernist tradition is highlighted by Houston A. Baker Jr. as he delineates the 'exclusive' and unchanging composite of the modernist identity: "The names and techniques of the 'modern' that are generally set forth constitute a descriptive catalog resembling a natural philosopher's curiosity cabinet" (3). The necessity to expand, or open the doors of this locked 'cabinet' becomes apparent, the contents of which "substitute a myth of unified purpose and intention for definitional certainty" which overtly excludes any black efforts at a modernist literary tradition (Baker 3). The out-dated tendency to restrict definitions of modernism to white and Anglo-Saxon literary histories underlines the difficulties which faced the Harlem Renaissance artist. Concurrently, this highlights the necessity to accommodate the Jamaican born McKay in a transnational sphere of cultural creativity, which encompasses the multi-locational nature of his life and career which exceed the limits of 'Harlem' and so suggest the contemporary challenges to accepted

definitions of the Harlem Renaissance. Hutchinson acknowledges the enormous progress in Harlem Studies since the late 1980s, as

> reconsiderations of the meaning of 'Modernism'—previously defined as a movement in which black writers played no part—coincided with a questioning of the segregation of 'black' from 'white' literature and growing dissatisfaction with prescriptive approaches to black writing that used racial 'authenticity' as a standard of judgement. (*The Cambridge Companion* 9)

Graham Allen makes a comparable point when he considers Aldon L. Nielsen's reflections on intertextuality: "Nielsen's argument leads not to the segregation of traditions into 'African' and 'American' but an explicit recognition that those traditions are woven into each other, and that no author writes a language which does not display this intertextual, double-voiced condition" (166). The distinct but mutually influential black and white American literary theories of the 1910s and 20s demand renewed attention; their implications are profound, political and canon-altering. The proper recognition of this hybrid black-and-white history had to wait until the 1980s, which indicates the intensity of white resistance to black literary modernism's inclusion in mainstream definitions of modernist literature, and speaks to the contemporary restructuring of the canon.

Similarly, the transgressive sexuality which emerges both internally in the literature, and externally in the creative atmosphere of the Renaissance which exceeds an America locus, must impact upon any reconfiguration of the canon. A necessary component of such revisionism is a recognition of the problematic nature of sexuality to literary reception and categorisation of identity at the time of the New

Negro: "The New Negro movement ostensibly promoted an ideology of egalitarianism . . . but a close study of the period suggests that sexual prejudice and oppression often permeated the doctrines and ideologies of the movement" (Jones 11). Jones deals here specifically with female exclusion from the canon because of both gender and class bias, but the same point may be made in relation to male transgressive sexuality, which crossed class lines, and was emergent in all spheres of black and white social life in late 1910s and early 1920s Harlem. McKay and Thurman represent covert and overt expressions of transgressive sexuality, McKay a private bisexual, and Thurman an open and at times theatrical homosexual voice of the Renaissance. Cooper suggests of McKay: "As in other areas of his life, he remained to the end highly ambivalent about his sexual preferences and probably considered bisexuality normal for himself, if not all mankind" (*Claude McKay* 75). Notions of ambivalence and duality are at the heart of most McKay criticism, and should be extended to his bisexuality.

Muthyala discusses neither McKay nor the Harlem Renaissance, yet McKay's complex inheritance may nonetheless be understood in the light of his theories of the transnational. Where the New Harlem Studies tends to focus on issues of class and displaced female or openly homosexual voices, McKay's Caribbean identity and masked bisexuality can often result in his exclusion from a place in a reconstructed Harlem canon, which is redefined and extended by McKay's transnationalist practices. Muthyala's transnational paradigm is more accommodating to McKay, and is reflective of the ideologies which McKay anticipated in his vagabondage and transnational writings. Reading McKay via Muthyala, then, suggests a symbiosis of theory and narrative. A globalised American Studies permits the accommodation of Caribbean and ethnic inheritance and transgressive sexualities in a transnational

frame of reference. Understood in these terms, and re-imagined through McKay's mobility, a reconstructed Harlem Renaissance or Harlem canon challenges received notions of American canonicity and identity, demanding an expansion of American horizons which can cater to the black cultural imagination beyond the national geo-political boundary. Indubitably, "the growing interest in globalization and transnationalism helped inspire interest in those aspects of the renaissance that exceeded the ideological and geographic boundaries of the nation-state" (Hutchinson, *The Cambridge Companion* 9).

McKay's faith in the minority was re-affirmed by his early experiences in Harlem and represents in his construction a point of reference for the diaspora, the identity and inheritance of which was threatened by the assimilationist aspirations of white America: "There is no other minority group in New York having such an extraordinary diversity of individuals of achievement and wealth who are compelled to live in the midst of the mass" (McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* 23). Assimilationist loss of identity is considered by Henry Louis Gates Jr. as a central effect of the Harlem Renaissance. Gates advocates the disciplinary recognition of a discrete, black cultural modernism in the face of white dominance and cultural hegemony, but one which also recognises the potency of black intertextuality. As Hutchinson suggests, however: "we should not, as Gates and Baker have argued, assimilate the culture of the "other" to some ethnocentric (though supposedly universal) standard of our own" (*The Harlem Renaissance* 5). America's exceptionalist ideology made little allowance for Harlem's cultural emergence as a contestatory space. Thus the Harlem Renaissance concurrently destabilised White America while empowering Black America, not least because of its transnational persona which invited the 'outsider' in, while looking outside itself to engage with a

multiplicity of ethnic, social and sexual identities. As Baker suggests, what was under threat in WASP America in reality was "an assumed supremacy of boorishly racist, indisputably sexist, and unbelievably wealthy Anglo-Saxon males" of the sort epitomised by F. Scott Fitzgerald's Tom Buchanan (4).

Cultural activists associated with 1920s Harlem, both the place and the movement, pre-empt Muthyala's nexus between the exclusion of minority identities and the rise of imperial ideologies. Terry Eagleton charts the history of imperialism, suggesting how it can figure as a social conditioning mechanism, used by the dominant class to rationalise lower class oppression: "one of its practical uses is to distract men and women from their oppression and exploitation by generating illusions and mystifications" (6). Baker confirms this accusation, when he cites the elitism of the white modernist canon as a mode of "shoving up one's self under perceived threats of 'democratization' and a 'rising tide' of color" (4). Intensely alert to their exclusion from a hegemonic American identity, black immigrants living in Harlem forged a distinctive cultural identity which supports Muthyala's paradigm, as he emphasises the necessity to "disturb and realign the relations among space, time and memory that create and sustain official hegemonic culture" (2). In that era of inter and intra-national migration, new-found wealth and unprecedented black and white communication, it seems inevitable that some 'disturbance' of hegemony would occur. Reconsidering the transnational quality of McKay's work, and of the Harlem Renaissance more generally, requires a recognition of its "global contours" and "the transnational shape of the movement and the disparate worldviews of its writers," while remembering McKay's extra-American habitation for the entirety of his literary creation of Harlem (Chaney 41). As Hutchinson proposes:

> The myth of American national identity as a unitary, self contained sphere was never so open to question . . . American cultural nationalism, particularly in its left wing cultural pluralist or 'transnationalist' form, was part of a global movement to which the Harlem Renaissance contributed importantly. (*The Harlem Renaissance* 11)

Certainly, America's exclusivist identity served to stifle the minority narratives of the Caribbean McKay and the homosexual Thurman.[10] McKay, a member of the West Indian diaspora living in Harlem in the 1920s, was one of a minority who stoically insisted on their own importance in American life: "Forming a racial majority in their own countries and not being accustomed to discrimination expressly felt as racial, they rebel against the "color line" as they find it in America" (Domingo 347). Other prominent West Indian migrants like Marcus Garvey championed the West Indian proletarian cause in Harlem by promoting ideologies (albeit untenable ones) of global black relocation to Africa, and the Caribbean spirit of rebellion against social injustice translated easily to Harlem: "The flame of revolt must have stirred in Garvey in his early youth when he found the doors to higher education barred against him through economic pressure" (Cooper, *The Passion* 67). Garvey's Black Star Line, U.N.I.A and his newspaper, the *Negro World*, demonstrate the

[10] Amplifying the transnational practices of McKay, his engagement with Alain Locke and the other cultural architects of the Harlem Renaissance happened beyond the limited site of Harlem, in Berlin in 1923, and later in Paris: "The Negroid élite was not so formidable to meet after all. The financial success of my novel had helped soften hard feelings in some quarters. . . . My agent in Paris gave a big party for the cast of *Blackbirds*, to which . . . other members of the black élite were invited" (*ALWFH* 314-5).

strength of the West Indian presence in Harlem in the 1910s and 20s, and the economic strivings of Garvey hark back to the central principles of sustainability and financial independence espoused by Booker T. Washington. Yet Garvey's obvious failings and 'eccentricities' had an impact on the general reception of Caribbean migrants in Harlem. David Levering Lewis suggests that "Resentment against Harlem's growing West Indian community was already welling up" (*When Harlem Was in Vogue* 41). In this charged atmosphere, the Jamaican-born McKay was isolated, by his own volition and on account of his nationality, from full participation in American life and this marginalised identity is in effect the recurring quandary of the protagonists of his fiction. This, too, is a position voiced in 1903 by Du Bois in his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk,* when he attempts to deconstruct the ambivalence of his place in white America:

> Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? . . . in this American world. . . . One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings. (2)

The isolation and 'otherness' that are palpable here speak directly to McKay's social liminality. Implicit in this experience is the suggestion of the impact of visible blackness in a predominantly white world, which causes the African American to see himself as the divided and dangerous figure analysed by Du Bois. This issue is taken up in Chapter Two, in the context of Atlantic proletarian politics.

The archetypal outsider, McKay moved in black and white working and middle class circles in the 1910s and 20s in America, Britain, France, Russia and North Africa, and met with expressions of limited acceptance in both groups in all loci. The

"interracial dynamics" which Hutchinson emphasises as a key stimulant to creation in the Harlem Renaissance is evident in McKay's personal and creative experiences (*The Harlem Renaissance* 14). Hutchinson insists on the shared persona of the black and white 'Renaissances' of the 1910s and 1920s, suggesting that the atmosphere of the era was one of cultural, inter-racial co-operation:

> the formation of the now 'traditional' American Renaissance canon and the blossoming of the Harlem Renaissance were parallel and complimentary, not antagonistic, developments, promoted by the same people, magazines, and publishing houses. (*The Harlem Renaissance* 126)

This vision of co-operation and mutuality which is perhaps lacking in the black commentary of the period is seen explicitly in autobiographical writings of the time, such as Langston Hughes' *Big Sea:*

> some Harlemites thought the millennium had come. They thought the race problem had been solved through Art plus Gladys Bentley. . . . I don't know what made any Negroes think that—except that they were mostly intellectuals doing the thinking. The ordinary Negroes hadn't heard of the Negro Renaissance. And if they had, it hadn't raised their wages any. (228)

Referring to a shared desire to detach American culture from British culture, Hutchinson highlights shared projects of cultural significance, and yet in doing this diminishes to an extent the arduous efforts of the black artist, who in reality, was starting from a much less empowered position than his white counterpart. Idealism in part clouds the harsh reality of an era in which segregation and rampant

discrimination were the norm and the black artist had little or no control over the level of complementarity on the part of a white controlled culture. As Hughes recognised: "As for all those white folks in the speakeasies and night clubs of Harlem—well, maybe a colored man could find some place to have a drink that the tourists hadn't yet discovered" (228).

Employed by Max Eastman in 1921 to co-edit the *Liberator* with Floyd Dell, Robert Minor and Eastman himself, McKay found shared anti-imperial sentiment there, and temporarily experienced a community of ideologies based on a rejection of Anglo-American capitalism and the British colonial mentality, coupled with a desire to restructure an American cultural identity which had "imbibed from infancy the literary culture of England" (Cooper, *Claude McKay* 77). The *Liberator*, a Marxist, reconstructed version of the banned journal *Masses*, spoke to the workers of the U.S and the concerns of the I.W.W. and appealed to the communist curiosity of McKay. Cooper suggests this early time at the paper was "the first time since boyhood, he had found, no matter how briefly, a home" (*Claude McKay* 137). Eastman appealed to this need, suggesting publicly that "Floyd Dell, Robert Minor and Claude McKay naturally belong to the editorial staff of the *Liberator*, and everyone will be pleased to see them where they belong" (qtd. in Cooper, *Claude McKay* 137). While working on the *Liberator* McKay encountered white celebrities from the artistic and political spheres. He became accustomed to visits from Charlie Chaplin and parties in the home of Eugen Boissevain, feeling "no white shadow and no black apprehension, no complexes arising out of conscious superiority or circumstantial inferiority" (*ALWFH* 119). Unsurprisingly, the offices of the *Liberator* were located in Greenwich Village, in the heart of the radical and revolutionary spirit of social experimentation which characterised that community.

Yet McKay stood at a certain distance from his *Liberator* peers. His term as assistant editor came to an end not for reasons of race, but due to his differences with Michael Gold over class issues. Gold replaced Eastman, and the co-editorial team of McKay and Gold was, from the beginning, fraught: "There could have been no worse combination, because personally and intellectually and from the first time we met, Michael Gold and I were opposed to each other" (McKay, *ALWFH* 138-9). Gold's desire to print only the work of the proletariat was troubling to McKay's artistic integrity: "I preferred to think that there was bad and mediocre, and good and great, literature and art, and that the class labels were incidental" (*ALWFH* 139). McKay's insistence on quality over a blanket acceptance of proletarian art offended Gold's own experience as a member of the proletariat: "Gold's social revolutionary passion was electrified with personal feeling that was sometimes as acid as lime juice" (*ALWFH*, 140). McKay again found himself in conflict with the ideals of white America, and seeing no way to bridge this difference with Gold, McKay left the New York intellectual scene in 1922 and departed for Russia in search of an ideology which could support class and cultural concerns: "Russia signaled . . . Escape from the pit of sex and poverty, from domestic death, from the cul-de-sac of self-pity, from the hot syncopated fascination of Harlem, from the suffocating ghetto of color consciousness. Go, better than stand still, keep going" (*ALWFH* 150).

Although U.S. born, Thurman arguably felt this sense of liminality even more intensely. Coming from Salt Lake City, Utah, and growing up in Los Angeles, Thurman was, unlike McKay, accustomed to the life of the black man in the United States in the early 20th century. However, it is not his heritage but his sexuality which side-lined his identity. America in the 1920s was not prepared for the black artist and particularly not for the black gay artist and yet this is the representative persona of

the Renaissance, for many critics. It was "surely as gay as it was black" (Gates, qtd. in Cobb, 329). McKay's often overlooked bisexuality and his colonial heritage are complicating factors in his quest for an inclusive transnational identity. Thurman's quest for identity is further complicated by his open homosexuality. If queer identity is often disguised in McKay's fiction, it is central to Thurman's—identity, we understand, may be marginalised as much by transgressive sexuality as by non-American citizenship. Michael Cobb sees the failure to merge the African American literary tradition and the homosexual writings of the Harlem Renaissance as harmful to the reception of artists like Thurman, McKay, Nugent and Hughes, as this implicitly isolates the creator from the canon: "there is a repetitive desire not to risk mixing the African American literary tradition with a sustained and systematic discussion of same sex sexuality" (329). Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman similarly suggests that it was not until James Baldwin wrote *Giovanni's Room* that overt homosexuality was imbricated with racial fiction. Baldwin's novel was received with hostility at a time when "early black novelists endeavoured to refigure blackness as (hetero)normative so that black Americans could enter the cultural mainstream and enjoy the full benefits of unqualified citizenship" (478).

The elitist aspirations of Alain Locke and W.E.B. Du Bois denounced explicit sexual content in art as a degradation of artistic ideals, and thus homosexual writings, and authors, risked further exclusion: "The incompatibility of queerness and Lockean racial aesthetics is . . . forcefully registered in Wallace Thurman's *Infants of the Spring*" (Cobb 337). This 'incompatibility' then further confuses the quest for an inclusive identity:

> explorations about queer sexuality and African-American literary production suffer from an inability to queer, substantially, the cultural

> expressions of race, especially once race becomes the organizing rubric under which a culture articulates a literary tradition. (Cobb 328)

Differing in the experience of exclusion, Thurman and McKay share a motivation to redefine their own identity in the American context, beyond the boundaries of nationalism and heterosexuality which both marginalised and threatened the individual.

The artistic aspirations of the 'first generation' of Harlem Renaissance artists such as Locke and Du Bois were opposed to the modernist oriented 'primitivism' of McKay and Thurman's creativity. And yet primitivism was a quality which McKay himself questioned, as it threatened to limit the possibilities of the poet:

> McKay particularly objected to the idea that everything needed to be turned 'upside down' in order to render the experience of 'the Negro' and he resisted the notion that he should write in a disorderly way simply because he was black. (North 114)

This contributes to McKay's characteristic ambivalence, because in his fiction there is a tangible cultivation of the primitive and elemental. Yet his adherence to standard and traditional poetic form in his verse (in poetry that is thematically radical) suggests his resistance to categorisation of any kind. The transgressive identities of these younger figures appeared as an active menace to the ambitions of the N.A.A.C.P., which placed the hope of racial uplift in the "enlightened minorities" or the 'Talented Tenth' of the Renaissance (Locke, "The New Negro" 9). The proletariat, the homosexual, the ignorant and the rude were one and the same in Du Bois and Locke's opinion, and as Cobb suggests, it was Thurman and McKay's intention to "use their young, Bohemian insolence, their queer figural positions, to

slap convention, and usher in the possibility of new forms of artistic and narrative expression" to undermine the superannuated standards of the elder figures (343). McKay, it may also be suggested, used his distance from the U.S. productively to avoid engagement with their seemingly limited concerns. Appalled by the content of McKay's *Home to Harlem*, Du Bois spurned all literary depictions of working class and sexualised Harlem: "our worst side has been so shamelessly emphasised," and he demands of the black artist that he must merely propagandise for the race, through art:

> all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. ("Criteria of Negro Art" 103)

Yet although Du Bois' behaviour and expectations were at variance with the younger generation of artists during the period of the Harlem Renaissance, his ultimate and earliest manifesto for black America was crucial and inspirational, albeit rooted in the cultural logic of U.S. America:

> He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American . . . without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (*The Souls of Black Folk* 3)

Yet Du Bois sacrificed something of this spirit and force when struck with the enormity of the racial divide in America. His initial passion for resistance to 'white Americanism' was muted by a resignation to the middle class aspirations with which

he is so frequently associated. The dichotomy between Locke and Du Bois and McKay and Thurman widens, as the latter strive to represent the spirit and beauty of the black diaspora and minority groups. There was a shared vision for the cultural output of the Harlem Renaissance which "emphasized the ambassadorial task of the arts in facilitating self-governance and liberation from colonial power" yet the divide lay in the modus operandi of the two generations (Chaney 44). Coleman suggests of McKay that "his exaltation of the primitive seems to be a genuine expression of his race conscious desire to extol what he sees as a vital force in the lives of the Negro lower class" (40). Coleman's use of 'primitive' here may indicate a critical blurring of the 'working classes' and the 'primitive' as McKay undoubtedly struggled with categorisation of the diaspora and minority group. As North suggests of Ray, McKay's alter-ego in *Home to Harlem*, McKay himself is "afraid of words because he dreads the loss of self-control and dignity that comes when one is 'formulated' by a phrase" (118).

American cultural imperialism rejected hybrid literary histories in favour of a monocultural national narrative deriving from Puritan origins, which was cultivated in part by the nationalistic xenophobia of early twentieth century America and which clung to notions of American racial purity and traceability of ancestry. This produced a strengthened hegemony of literary and political ideals which remained unchallenged to any real extent until the more militant political movements of 1960s America. Randolph Bourne, described by Van Wyck Brooks as the "dedicated 'enlightened man'" of 1910s white intellectualism, writing in a Progressivist vein in 1916, presages current New Americanist Studies of transnationalism (31). Promoting the idea of an inclusive national identity which values the Eastern European migrant and asserts their equality beside the Anglo-Saxon 'pure' American, Bourne proposes

that "America is a unique sociological fabric, and it bespeaks poverty of imagination not to be thrilled at the incalculable potentialities of so novel a union of man" (91). Writing in response to the bigoted nationalism of the 1890s, and the anti-German sentiment of the 1910s, Bourne focuses on the plight of Eastern European migrants in New York. Although his broad mindedness and anti-war sentiments resulted in government surveillance, he championed the cause of the immigrant and earned himself political identification with the "socialist leanings" of Walt Whitman (Brooks 31-5). His theories of inclusivity and class and race based American equality for the Eastern European migrant comprises an early transnationalism which better caters to McKay, and other Jamaican and black diasporic figures in New York.[11]

In the field of twenty-first century American Studies, Pease advocates a New Americanist approach to reconstructing the canon, envisaging this in almost revolutionary terms which will allow the (unnamed) minority access to both literary and political freedom:

> To overturn the hegemonic successfully requires that oppositional forces . . . elicit identification from previously disadvantaged minority

[11] Rodica Mihăilă emphasises also the exclusion of the colonised from Bourne's paradigm and this is an important reminder also of McKay's colonial identity:

> Bourne saw America as 'the intellectual background' of a worldwide struggle over the hegemonic nature and prerogatives of the modern European State. Transnationalism for him then describes the process by which an imagined America would ideally provide a national political framework for a culture of international identities. But since, in his opinion, only (European) immigrants who come from unitary nation-states have the capacity to imagine a new transnational community, colonial immigrants are implicitly excluded from the process. (2)

> groups, and . . . enable the construction of a prevailing alternate interpretation of reality able to turn the pervasive conflict of interpretations to the use of certain groups. (*Revisionist Interventions* 30)

Critics such as Cobb in the New Harlem Studies also expand the canon to accommodate transgressive sexuality, yet it is Muthyala's paradigm which best supports the complexity of McKay's persona, allowing him to transcend racial, sexual, locational and ancestral limitations. Developing "different ways of conceiving of historical inheritance that counter the narrowly racialized, excessively territorialized, and deeply gendered ideas of America" allows the Harlem Renaissance to be redefined as a key moment in the development of the American and African American and African Caribbean literary traditions, with McKay positioned as an early advocate of the necessity to 'reworld' black identity in a globalised and transnational framework (Muthyala 13). The quest for transnational identity which defines much of McKay's career extends beyond the duality of American or West Indian sites. As Hutchinson suggests, echoing philosopher John J. McDermott's theories of cultural subjectivity:

> the various subcultures within the American field help determine the forms of one another's discourse, not only because of directly political and economic relations, but particularly insofar as each subculture orients its discourse in relation to the 'meaning' of a shared if multivalent symbol—'America'—that is politically as well as culturally constitutive. (*The Harlem Renaissance* 80)

In the context of this wider significance of Harlem's cultural renaissance, McKay's *Home to Harlem* and Wallace Thurman's *Infants of the Spring* emerge as transgressive novels which comport with paradigms of relocation for the black immigrant, and the need to reposition these displaced writers as figures with a 'reworlded' identity becomes apparent. Considering firstly the significance of Harlem as a problematic urban setting in *Home to Harlem* and *Infants of the Spring*, allows us to free discussion of McKay from the reductive binaries according to which his writing has routinely been assessed. It restores to McKay his "reworlded" identity. Turning then to an exploration of the impact of colour-consciousness upon identity, Ray in *Home to Harlem* is a central figure in explorations of black transnational identity. Ray and Stephen in *Infants of the Spring* represent the dichotomy of black and white racial and cultural motivations for living in Harlem. In contrast to McKay's appreciation for minority identity defined by colour consciousness, Thurman creates a world which craves an absence of colour and minority.

Key to this discussion of the diasporic quality of 1920s Harlem literature is the exploration of urban settings in *Home to Harlem* and *Infants of the Spring.* It is notable that McKay wrote much of *Home to Harlem* in Antibes in 1927, removed from the intensity of Jazz Age Harlem; his absence from America since 1922 reflects the diasporic nature of McKay's writing, since his departure from Jamaica, his birthplace, in 1912. Although a British colonial possession, and as Cooper highlights, ruled directly by British Crown-Colony Rule following the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion, the Jamaican majority population was black (*Claude McKay* 3). Lacking social divisions based on colour, McKay grew up in an environment devoid of minority sentiments of weakness, and "by virtue of their superior economic

position and Christian education, the dark skinned McKays could claim a social position in Jamaican society akin to that of the traditional mulatto elite" (Cooper, *Claude McKay* 7). His childhood thus was an idyllic era lacking any feelings of racial inferiority: "His earliest years became in his memory a kind of Eden" (Cooper, *Claude McKay* 11).

Coming to America thus, as an unselfconscious West Indian, McKay was violently introduced to race consciousness. He wrote in *Pearson*'s magazine in September 1918 in an article entitled "Claude McKay Describes his Own Life: A Negro Poet", that his first year in America was "the first time I had ever come face to face with such manifest, implacable hate of my race, and my feelings were indescribable" (275). In Jamaica social distinctions were "of the English sort, subtle and dignified, rooted in class distinction—color and race being hardly taken into account" (qtd. in Cooper, *The Passion* 48). McKay often represents rural Jamaica as an idyll in his boyhood memoirs, *My Green Hills of Jamaica*: "The Clarendon hills are renowned in Jamaica as one of the most fertile regions. There grow in abundance . . . bananas, oranges, coco, coffee, pimento . . . And oh, there are so many rivers and rivulets and springs" (Morris 23). This pastoral Caribbean exists in stark contrast to urban America and its racism, and yet McKay embeds his fictional characters within the proletariat of Harlem. His novel was unfavourably received by the "colored elite" who "thought that if animal joy and sin and sorrow and dirt existed in the Belt as they did in the ghettos . . . they had no place in literature, and therefore my book was a deliberate slander against Aframerica" (McKay qtd. in Cooper, *The Passion* 135).

Alluding to the autobiographical quality of *Home to Harlem*, McKay reflects: "They were scenes from the Harlem I knew during the many years I lived there and worked as a porter in New York buildings" (McKay, *A Long Way from Home* 282).

The imbrication of fiction and autobiography, literature and lived experience, enhances and yet also complicates the authenticity of McKay's representations of Harlem, underlined further by his remoteness from America at the time of writing the novel. As Laura Marcus suggests, a quality of duality is inherent in autobiography:

> The spatial metaphors of 'inside' and 'outside' which repeatedly appear in a range of critical discussions are closely linked with oppositions between the self and world, private and public, subjectivity and objectivity, the interior spaces of mind and personal being and the public world. (4)

Key to the binary of absence and presence inherent in diasporic writing is McKay's rural inheritance, and the way in which this weighs on his retrospective documentary of Harlem:

> Like a flock of luxuriant, large-lipped orchids spreading over the side of a towering rock, the color of African life has boldly splashed itself upon the north end of Manhattan. . . . it has grown like an expansive tropical garden, springing naturally from the Northern soil. (McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* 16)

McKay unites urban construction and rural imagery to empower and give credence to the ethnic, and frequently island inheritance of the Harlem populace. Domingo documents the influx of migrants to Harlem between 1920 and 1923, and suggests a forty percent increase in the foreign born black population (342). Within those figures, "The largest number come from the British West Indies and are attracted to America mainly by economic reasons: though considerable numbers of the younger

generation come for the purposes of education" (Domingo 342). The West Indian presence in Harlem brought a new psychology to the diasporic collective. Their contempt for America's racist mentality reflects the opposing racial context of the islands and also "helped to radicalize Renaissance politics as Caribbean-born organizers drew upon a 'long and distinguished tradition of resistance' to promulgate socialism to the Harlem masses" (Chaney 47). This strength of identity then resulted in an intensified sense of distinction, disputed by white America, and cultivated by black America: "The outstanding contribution of West Indians to American Negro life is the insistent assertion of their manhood in an environment that demands too much servility and unprotesting acquiescence from men of African blood" (Domingo 349). The diasporic looking backwards to a fertile past coupled with the reality of the austere urban sprawl epitomises McKay's evocation of the Harlem space.

"It was two years since he had left Harlem. Fifth Avenue, Lenox Avenue, and One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street, with their chocolate-brown and walnut-brown girls" (McKay, *Home to Harlem* 8). Harlem is defined here and elsewhere in terms of absence and sexuality, and is the site of return and departure for the picaresque protagonist Jake Brown. In Jake's overt desire for Harlem in all its multifarious aspects, McKay creates a vision of proletarian urban hedonism. Harlem presents an endless potential for escapism, primarily in the form of episodic romances with "Brown girls rouged and painted like dark pansies. Brown flesh draped in soft colourful clothes. Brown lips full and pouted for sweet kissing. Brown breasts throbbing with love" (8). Typifying the transience of Jake's existence is his boredom with notions of security and lasting intimacy: "I'm always ready for something new" (6). His initial focus in Harlem is sensuality, and the pursuit of a woman who can fulfil his desires: "I ain't gwine to know no peace till I lay these

here hands on mah tantalizing brown again" (27). This relish in the physical indicates an intimacy with a Harlem which Jake figures as both feminised and sexualised. This vision of America as female is not an original construction of African American or African Caribbean writing in the 1920s; Anne McClintock recalls Columbus's initial conception of the land: "it was shaped like a woman's breast, with a protuberance upon its summit in the unmistakeable shape of a nipple-toward which he was slowly sailing" (21); Annette Kolodny, too, emphasises the tendency of early Puritan settlers to define the "Virgin Land" available on the Western frontier in terms of its female, and indubitably fertile potential. Kolodny highlights the stereotypical and omnipresent trope of America's pure and untainted femininity: "your bride will shortly bring forth new and most abundant offspring, such as will delight you and yours" (3). The matrimonial, virginal allusion deviates from Jake's almost whorish take on the female sexual persona of Harlem, which is neither tied to pastoral imagery nor innocent.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, too, creates the idea of a dystopic space in *The Great Gatsby*, an American Eden now fallen from grace, due to the immorality and excesses of man in the 1920s. The

> fresh green breast of the new world. . . . Its vanished trees . . . had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent . . . face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (183)

Where once life was passionate and frenzied, now is a "huge incoherent failure of a house" (183). McKay's Harlem reveals a comparable perversion of the unspoilt perfection of the land, of space in an American context which emphasises both the heightened sexual tensions of Harlem, while simultaneously providing shelter for McKay from scrutiny of his own bisexuality. The marriage metaphors which describe America in early travel writing like Hakluyt's are absent in McKay's figuring of Jake's fleeting passions, and the urban space is denigrated to an extent by its inability to nourish lasting interactions. The hetero-normativity which is intrinsic in the settler ideology is absent in the migrant ideology in 1920s Harlem, and the disparity between Harlem and the 'Virgin Land' of white Puritanism extends to further isolate the Jamaican and ethnic migrant. As Kolodny suggests of the "flowering prairie paradise", it had the potential capacity to "generously" support "an extended human family, at the center of which stood a reunited Adam and Eve" (9). McKay reconstructs the archetypal Adam and Eve bond in a queer space, which as we will see, is overtly and even aggressively sexualised. This perversion of the American 'paradise' and its Edenic formulations of human interaction indicates the unsuitability of this history for the black, Caribbean bisexual migrant, and in McKay's (homo)eroticised portrayal of Harlem he further deviates from received cultural norms.

Kolodny describes "sanctioned cultural scripts" which stimulated certain and differing socially prescribed fantasies of place and possibility for the early male and female settlers (12). These 'scripts' are contested in *Home to Harlem;* although attempting to hide behind hetero-normative standards, there is a notable challenge to the universal acceptance of the Adam and Eve construction. For McKay and Thurman, Harlem and Greenwich Village were spaces for transgressive sexuality,

and their particular construction of the site indicates how personal ideologies are inextricably linked to the creation of the fantasy space, as Kolodny suggests was done by both male and female Puritan settlers (12). Without the supporting structure of the 'American myth' of gendered settlement patterns, Harlem figures as a site of amusement and diversion, thus undermining the centrality of 'home' in the novel's title. Indeed, so engrained is Jake's vagabond mentality that he is defined by dislocation, refusing to be contained by the locatedness of 'home'. His first hours in Harlem are spent in cabarets, strangers' bedrooms and bars from his past, and yet nothing in these loci indicate a 'home-coming'. He is intoxicated instead by the pleasures and distractions of Harlem: "his whole body was a flaming wave" (12). He reflects on the life-affirming properties of Harlem, an Eden where physicality and its satisfaction are all that matters: "Harlem! Harlem! . . . Where could I have all this life but Harlem?" (14).

This quality of escapism which defines Harlem is found as potently in Greenwich Village, a place frequented by both McKay and Thurman. George Chauncey suggests, this was

> a liminal space in which visitors were encouraged to disregard some of the social injunctions that normally constrained their behaviour, allowing them to observe and vicariously experience behaviour that in other settings—particularly their own neighbourhoods—they might consider objectionable enough to suppress. (*Long-Haired Men and Short-Haired Women* 159)

The sense of freedom and diversion captured in this assessment serves to underline the opportunity which existed for the emergence of transgressive sexualities in both

Harlem and the Village, and the tolerance of homosexuality and gender transgression was sustained in part by the experimental and unconventional atmosphere of both loci. Along with Harlem, Greenwich Village cultivated a queer space which could only exist once the conventional family unit of the Puritan ideal was deconstructed, and with its demise was the opportunity to nurture diverse, authentic and reconstructed possibilities for human relationships beyond the confines of the Adam and Eve tradition. The redundancy of regulated intimacy and forced conventional matrimony was repudiated vociferously in the pre-war Village, and the potential for artistic expression was inextricably linked to the degeneration of the traditional and stereotypical family unit:

> unmarried men and women who wished or needed to live without the domestic services conventionally provided in families by the unpaid household labour of women . . . were thus freed both to develop social lives unencumbered by family obligations and to engage in work likely to be more creative than remunerative. (Chauncey, *Long Haired Men*, 153)

Once the boundaries of hetero-normative gender roles were challenged, it seems almost inevitable that amidst the current of experimentation in a space which permitted altered social systems, possibilities should emerge for transgressive sexualities.

Greenwich Village, rejected by much of the American elite, Chauncey suggests, "was often regarded as un-American, and in some contexts calling men 'artistic' became a code for calling them homosexual" (*Long Haired Men* 153). This exclusivity of 'Americaness,' which tellingly rejects art and homosexuality, presents

boundless challenges to the already marginalised black bi- and homosexual Caribbean and African American migrant and underscores the dominance of hegemonic white Protestant American. This makes the cultivation of queer space in such bordered loci both inevitable and urgent, because there was no possibility for a greater expression of transgressive sexuality outside the margins of experimental, liberal and artistic society, and even less so for the black artist in white America. As Harlem became a beacon for the Southern migrant fleeing archaic and conservative politics, so too did Greenwich Village become something of a 'capital' for the sexually marginalised and artistically oppressed across America:

> the Village became an even more important national symbol over the course of the twenties, as the cultural gap between Prohibition America and Jazz Age New York seemed to widen, as rural politicians pandered to prohibitionist and nativist constituencies by denouncing New York as the nation's Sodom and Gomorrah. (Chauncey, *Long Haired Men* 156)

Defying Prohibition was indicative of a larger trend of rebellion against sanctioned behavioural norms, and the tolerance for homosexuality amongst a percentage of Harlem and Greenwich Village inhabitants demonstrates an atmosphere of liberalism untouched by greater American prejudices. As Lewis Erenberg suggests, "the Village was the perfect spot to merchandise the concept of free expression of personal desires on all levels" (361). Yet considering again the class concerns of the Renaissance, open homosexuality was more predominant in the bohemian and working classes of both sites. Both black and white middle classes publically rejected the homosexual lifestyle, and as Chauncey suggests, "Sexuality became one of the crucial measures by which the black middle class differentiated

itself from the working class and constituted itself a class" (*Gay New York* 253). As Cobb indicates, to blend blackness and gayness was to simply quell all hopes for social advancement, and the extended imbrications of class and sexuality proves unyieldingly problematic. In Harlem, homosexuality could be adopted by visiting voyeurs as a mode of entertainment for a night or two, and yet outside the realm of escapism and diversion, gayness held little or no value to identity. Mere frivolity, and a possession of the working class, transgressive sexuality thus becomes marred by association, and cannot function as a real and equal identity for the black or white gay man or woman. The vocal 'othering' of the gay individual allows, to an extent, the marginally excluded individual to place him or herself within a society. McKay frequently exhibits a complex harshness to his gay characters, particularly to female gay characters, perhaps in a bid to distance himself from their identity, and to avoid further isolation.[12] As Chauncey suggests, "While many black middle-class men—like white middle-class men—found the drag queen a disquieting figure, he also served as a foil whose utter effeminacy confirmed the manliness of other black men" (*Gay New York* 260). Yet the soul of the homosexual world which developed within the broader world of black and white life in Harlem and Greenwich Village was with the artistic and working classes, in part because they enjoyed personal freedom and lack of family constraints, and also because they were living in Harlem and Greenwich Village and so were more exposed to experimental and progressive lifestyles.

[12] Jake and Ray, on their first encounter on the railroad, discuss the tale of Sappho which Ray is reading: "'Her story gave two lovely words to modern language,' says the waiter. . . . 'Sapphic and Lesbian . . . beautiful words. . . That's what we calls bulldyker in Harlem,' drawled Jake. 'Them's all ugly womens.'" (129).

Yet if McKay depicts Harlem as alluring, it is also filled with disease and figures as a site of contagion: "Oh, the contagious fever of Harlem. Burning everywhere in dark-eyed Harlem . . . Burning now in Jake's sweet blood" (15). Poverty, alcoholism, lack of medical care and ignorance of sexual health led to innumerable instances of illness in Harlem, and McKay translates this literal disease into symbolic malady:

> Could he create out of the fertile reality around him? Of Jake nosing through life, a handsome hound, quick to snap up any tempting morsel of poisoned meat thrown carelessly on the pavement? . . . until life appeared like one big disease and the world a vast hospital? (228-9)

The 'poisoned meat' acts here as a disturbing allusion to the hedonistic lifestyles of many migrants, inevitably sickened by excessive and reckless habits played out in the Harlem cabarets and speakeasies. Lee Jenkins notes a comparable symbolism in McKay's poem "The Desolate City," where "a symbolic vision of the city as the condition of human life" is devastatingly dark, even more so considering its creation during McKay's treatment for syphilis in a Paris hospital in 1923 (*The Language of Caribbean Poetry* 42-4). The city and the body are besieged by infertility and disease, and poisonous influences and substances which

> ooze up from below
>
> And spread their loathsome substances through its lanes
>
> Flooding all areas with their evil flow
>
> And blocking all the motions of its veins (5-8)

The ‘desolate’ city thus perverts any and all positive connotations of the urban space. As Jenkins goes on to suggest: “McKay’s characteristic organic imagery of growth is stunted or inverted” indicating just how destructive the city can be to the individual (*The Language* 44). The sterility of T.S.Eliot’s *The Waste Land* is recalled, and the echoing of the barren urbanity depicted by Eliot lends the evocation of the city an infertile and grim aspect.

McKay’s evocation of the city prefigures Frank O Connor’s suggestion that Guy de Maupassant’s short stories operate amongst the “submerged sexual population of 19th century Europe” which, by the author’s ‘submergence’ in this class allows representations which, on a surface level liberates the oppressed proletariat from being subjects of mockery (584). Through the transformative power of literature, they become realised individuals with the potential to participate in social and political life. Yet this literary representation of and personal relationship with the ‘submerged population’ becomes harmful to the artist, in O Connor’s view, and he figures the bond as ultimately syphilitic, ironically and grimly reminiscent of McKay’s own lived experience: “It is the perversion of the creative faculty until it becomes destructive” (591) This is suggested too in “The Desolate City”, as Jenkins refers to McKay’s feeling of “deadly ennui” resultant from an illness common in the working classes which “so reduced his creative and sexual powers” (*The Language* 44). Ann Douglas suggests in the wider context of New York in the 1920s that “short- term inspiration could convert into long-term deterioration, if not outright disaster” when the artist becomes embedded in a lifestyle of alcoholism and reckless hedonism (23). Thus the casual, almost comic, comments on the dangers of the hedonistic lifestyle contained in *Home to Harlem* become very real threats to the individual:

> All you know is cabarets and movies and the young gals them exposing them legs a theirs in them jumper frocks. . . . But it's very dangerous if you are foolish. I know you chaps take those things lightly. But you shouldn't, for the consequences are very dangerous. (220-1)

The ominous 'But' here succinctly indicates a counter-image of Harlem.

Harlem is a microcosm of black and white New York. Douglas charts the ways in which New York has been located as a site that threatens individual identity. F. Scott Fitzgerald left New York when his wife, Zelda, gave birth to their child, deeming it "inappropriate to bring a baby into all that glamour and loneliness" (qtd. in Douglas 22). Eugene O Neill conceived of Manhattan as "a swirl of excited nothingness" and James Thurber's critique is frank: "There is nothing else in all the countries of the world like New York life. . . . It does more to people, it socks them harder than life in Paris, London or Rome possibly could" and is "nothing but a peaceful Verdun" (qtd. in Douglas 22-3). Max Eastman wrote in a letter on the nineteenth of October 1930 archived in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, that he found New York

> more impossible than ever as a place to stay in. I once spent a night travelling through the desert inside of a box car. I don't know whether you know how much noise a box car can make when a freight train is going fast, but the idea of living in New York reminds me of that night.

Uniting 'white' Manhattan with 'black' Harlem, Hutchinson points out that critics such as Sterling Brown rejected the title, the "*Harlem* Renaissance" because it fails

to recognise the wider spectrum of influence of Manhattan on the cultural movement: "one must acknowledge that without the particular conditions existing in Harlem, and Manhattan generally, the 'Negro Renaissance' would have been vastly different" (*The Harlem Renaissance* 6-7). Hutchinson's belief in the "interracial dynamics" of the Renaissance then conceives of the movement in broader terms than those of the black cultural nationalism of the 1920s (*The Harlem Renaissance* 14). Yet it is problematic to connect the two loci as bi-racial sites for Renaissance. Anecdotally, Douglas recalls *The New Yorker's* report into the diminished life span of New Yorkers when compared with their peers in Kansas, and Douglas suggests that "the city may kill what it quickens. Its stepped up rhythm and the accelerated pace can become, not boring, never boring, but taxing, even life-threatening to those caught up in the beat" (22). Although vocalised by white men of the Jazz Age, a similarly harmful experience in Harlem is depicted by both Thurman and McKay in their fiction, and to an extent, the gulf between the black and white experience of 1920s New York is reduced. The destructive elements of city living, epitomised most frequently by alcoholism and careless sexual relationships, impacted on both McKay and Thurman. The harshness of the city described by Thurber and Eastman, and the brutality implied by his allusion to Verdun, describe the effect which Harlem had on McKay and Thurman. Echoing the frivolous and escapist reputation of Harlem as illustrated by McKay and Thurman, Douglas suggests: "As a place, New York became for many people, impossible; as an experience it was, often for the same people, essential" (25). Douglas conveys the paradoxical identity of New York which pervades McKay's conception of Harlem, as it initially assuages the thrill-starved Jake, yet relentlessly impairs his sense of stability with the effects of excess. He yields initially to the seductive force of Harlem's hedonism, and yet crucially

realises that he must leave. Thus, Douglas' consideration of New York supports Jake's, and indeed Ray's quest to vacate the site in which they had such rich and varied experience, but which ultimately became 'impossible' as a locus of settlement.

McKay was well aware of the popular view of Harlem as an infamous site, with its own illicit fascinations:

> The build-up of a fashionable and artistic Harlem became the newest fad of Manhattanites in the middle nineteen twenties. And the propaganda in favour of it was astoundingly out of proportion to the . . . actual artistic and intellectual achievement. (*Harlem: Negro Metropolis* 26)

This retrospective reflection on Harlem and its cultural products engages with considerations of *Home to Harlem* as a celebration or a betrayal of the African American community of 1920s Harlem. The fundamental ambivalence surrounding the reception of this novel mirrors the theme of ambiguous social acceptance it explores. W.E.B. Du Bois famously emphasised the 'filthiness' of the novel, suggesting "he had felt distinctly unclean and in need of a bath" after reading it (Cooper, *Claude McKay* 244). Morris suggests: "McKay was accused by W.E.B. Du Bois of catering to that prurient demand on the part of white folk for a portrayal in Negroes of that utter licentiousness which conventional civilization holds white folk back from enjoying" ("Contending Values" 37). [13] Others of the younger generation,

[13] Mervyn Morris writes also of Marcus Garvey's aversion to the novel:

> The portrayal angered a number of prominent Negroes, including Marcus Garvey: 'a damnable libel against the Negro,' he called the novel; he included McKay among

like Hughes proclaimed it "the finest thing we've done yet" giving "a second youth to the Negro Vogue" (Hughes qtd. in Cooper, *Claude McKay* 243). The divide lay in the reception of the perceived primitivism of the novel, and in many ways it is this conflict which epitomises Jake's experiences within Harlem because he cherishes the primal, and yet eventually flees its control. This escape perhaps inverts McKay's vocal repudiation of the bourgeois disgust for *Home to Harlem* expressed by Du Bois:

> Certainly I sympathize with and even pity you for not understanding my motive. . . . deep sunk in depravity though he may be, the author of *Home to Harlem* prefers to remain unrepentant and unregenerate and he 'distinctly' is not grateful for any baptism of grace in the cleansing pages of the *Crisis*. (*The Passion* 150)

The tension surrounding the novel translates to Jake's experience of Harlem as its flux and inconstancy paradoxically epitomises for him sentiments of home: "Happy, familiar Harlem" (15).

Muthyala's espousal of the power of a distinct literary representation to forge a renewed identity is apparent here, as McKay's evocation of Harlem deviates from depictions of white materialism of the 1920s before the Wall Street Crash. This, too, is perhaps indicative of Baker's theory of the "deformation of mastery" in black American literature, which, when employed, can "distinguish rather than [conceal]. It secures territorial advantage and heightens a group's survival possibilities" (51).

> 'such Negro authors whom we may fairly designate 'literary prostitutes.' '; and he called for the encouragement of those black authors who try to 'advance our race through healthy and decent literature.' (*Contending Values* 37)

This primal consideration of the potency of self-advertisement to survive translates fluently to McKay's construction of Harlem, and supports his evocation of the stoic proletariat which refuses to submit to the white codes of Anglo-Saxon America in order to survive. Sinclair Lewis's illustration of a world of rampant materialism in *Babbitt* encapsulates the modern tragedy of our relationship with commercialism, whereas McKay captures a world of colour, of passion and the possibility of a life lived without wealth. This contrast in depiction troubles Hutchinson's theory to an extent, as the perspective of the black and white artist are so clearly disparate and respond differently to the post-war atmosphere of alienation and fragmentation. In *Home to Harlem* the "deep-dyed color, the thickness, the closeness of it. The noises of Harlem" radiate with an identity at a distinct variance from the bland, monochrome materialism of the America described in *Babbitt* (15). McKay consciously creates a unique world which empowers New York's black populace. Perceived as a filthy betrayal of black middle-class respectability by W.E.B. Du Bois, *Home to Harlem* is instead McKay's attempt to depict Harlem as a locus which can at least potentially support a globalised black transnational identity.

Harlem housed immigrants from the South, from Africa, Europe and the Caribbean; a location of considerable diversity, its culture is characterised by the diverse expressions of these voices. McKay creates a space in America for the black diasporic proletariat and Harlem symbolises for Jake, if only for the present, a chance to be a part of a distinct black American community: "Harlem is mine!" (17). As McKay suggested:

> As Aframericans express themselves in the common American idiom and have shed all the externals of African traits, the distinguishing

> characteristic of Harlem lies in the varied features and the African color of its residents. (*Harlem: Negro Metropolis* 21-2)

Bourne supported this idea of distinction and diversity of ethnic minorities, and recognised the value to the imaginative and political spheres in America of the immigrant: "America shall be what the immigrant will have a hand in making it" (87). Although referring explicitly to Eastern European immigrants in the U.S., Bourne advocates the necessity to avoid assimilation as the answer to racial diversity in the quest for a national identity, and acknowledges the impact of the immigrant upon American life at its most basic level: "We have needed the new peoples . . . to save us from our own stagnation" (87). Bourne highlights the strength of unique social identities, and as McKay seeks to empower the New World African diaspora through a particular literary identity, Bourne suggests that it is the resilience of minority identity to cultural absorption that is the key to their importance in America:

> The foreign cultures have not been melted down or run together, made into some homogenous Americanism, but have remained distinct but cooperating to the greater glory and benefit not only of themselves but of all the native 'Americanism' around them. (90)

Countering this anti-assimilationist stance is the somewhat contradictory later thinking of Boas, which suggested that the only and lasting solution to racism is, in fact, assimilation. Hutchinson explains: "Boas went so far as to suggest that ultimately the 'race problem' in the United States could only be solved through interracial marriage, which would reduce racial differences and the social divisions based upon them" (*The Harlem Renaissance* 74). The contradiction inherent in Boas'

theories is indicative of the enormity of the cultural discordance in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the wavering commitment to a specific ideology suggests the importance of Bourne's 'Trans-national' paradigm which demands neither assimilation nor segregation but genuine intra-national cultural co-operation. The black literary canon assumes its own distinct identity within a redefined 'American' canon, rather than merging the two cultures into a crudely assimilated mass. The transnational identity advocated by Bourne in a Caucasian context is adopted by McKay and employed to forge a comparable space for the black diaspora. Bourne suggests that "America is coming to be, not a Nationality, but a Transnationality. A weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors" (96). This pre-vision of Paul Gilroy's theory of the Black Atlantic demonstrates how Bourne's theory needed expansion to accommodate the black diaspora, but also how it impacted upon McKay's own construction of diasporic identity in America, suggestive as it is of movement and encounter.

McKay is far from sentimental in his representation of Harlem in *Home to Harlem*, and is swift to demonstrate the degradation of a life lived in urban chaos, where desperation leads to violence and substance abuse: "It's a bloody ungodly place where niggers nevah go to bed. All night running around speakeasies and cabarets, where bad, hell-bent nigger womens am giving up themselves to open sin" (79). Not an assault on the black proletariat, McKay's criticism is instead directed at the failure of the North to provide for the influx of impoverished, ill-educated Southern migrants from the post-Reconstruction era onwards. Feeing debased by experiences in Harlem, Jake departs again on the railroad, to avoid "the atmosphere of Harlem. If I don't git away from it for a while, it'll sure git me" (125). The social

conditions in Harlem lead to problematic relations within the African American community, which the dense population serves to aggravate, rather than support: "Wese too thick together in Harlem. Wese all just lumped together without the chanst to choose and so we nacherally hate one another" (285). Harlem cannot support the black exile, and America refuses to nourish a transnational black identity within the nation. American political and social policy served to stunt opportunities for black education and economic progression, and instilled sentiments of inferiority in the black collective who absorbed the tenets of racial exclusion: "When we feels like going out, it's better we enjoy ourse'f in the li'l corner the white folks 'low us, and then shuffle along back home" (98). The dominant ideology of the white upper classes is thus absorbed by the minority and does in fact surface troublingly in the minority psyche.[14] The frustration of Ray, Jake's railroad companion, expresses precisely this dichotomy, nurtured by white America to ensure the subjection of the black collective: "There must be something mighty inspiriting in being . . . the white citizen of a nation that can say bold, challenging things like a strong man. . . . Something the black man could never feel nor quite understand" (154). Harlem, as an urban home for the displaced migrant, is betrayed by America, which accounts in part for the vagabondage of the Harlem Renaissance artists:

> Itinerant impulses may have been particularly strong in Hughes and McKay, but many literary figures of the Harlem movement traveled

[14] Frantz Fanon famously theorised the "inferiority" complexes of black men and the colonised with a psychoanalytic approach: "because he lives in a society that makes his inferiority complex possible, in a society that derives its stability from the perpetuation of this complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race; to the identical degree to which that society creates difficulties for him, he will find himself thrust into a neurotic situation" (74).

> widely and for various reasons, shoring up experiences as creative and intellectual fodder and honing a much needed critical distance from American systems of radicalization. (Chaney 50)

The transnational dimension of the movement thus imbues it with a wider cultural resonance, and allows significant space for the complex inheritance of McKay, as his ceaseless travelling complicates judgements of America as a locus for rejuvenated identity and self-definition.

Locke's project, *The New Negro*, infuriated McKay for its "playing safe attitude" and "weak line" (qtd. in Cooper, *Claude McKay* 225). Locke's aspirations to move seamlessly into white middle class society enraged the younger generation of the movement, and McKay's scorn for Locke was uncompromising: "you are a died-in-the-wool pussy-footing professor" (qtd. in Cooper, *Claude McKay* 225). Yet although differing in opinion on class, both men, and indeed Thurman, share something of what Baker calls the "radical marronage" which aimed to reconstitute a black collective, based on a cultural renaissance in Harlem (75). Referring to Richard Price's theories of maroon societies which "band together . . . to create independent communities of their own", Baker positions Locke as a participant in the "deformation of mastery" technique which accompanies much of McKay's efforts, seen perhaps more obviously in his poetry (76). As Jenkins suggests:

> Baker uses the 'discursive strategies' he designates as 'the mastery of form' and 'the deformation of mastery' to defend the use of forms such as the sonnet in the work of writers like McKay. . . . the black poet's mastery of such forms entails the subversive deformation of the

> Western literary tradition, and by extension that of the racial status quo. (43)[15]

In light of this, McKay's tactics are singularly more militant than Locke, who, although engaging with the notion of the 'deformation of mastery' and 'mastery of form', does so in a more apologetic and less confrontational way than McKay.

To return to 'radical marronage', the maroon is well placed, suggests Price, to enter into the society which has previously oppressed him, because of his understanding of the 'master' role, and his "firm understanding of African modes of existence" (Baker 76). This maroon symbolises the diasporic artist of the Harlem Renaissance who is positioned on the margins of an American society which he can artistically subvert in order to productively re-create. Arising from the migration into and out of Harlem, and the cultural encounter resultant from this mobility, is the "unified community of national interests set in direct opposition to the general economic, political and theological tenets of a racist land" (Baker 77). Yet here again Locke and McKay are opposed, on the level of their perception of the success of this 'deformation of mastery' in Harlem. McKay repeatedly endows Harlem with destructive, sterile and even poisonous qualities, suggesting inherently the dystopic space which resulted from this idyllic aim. Locke, in contrast, evokes a site of potential greatness: "In Harlem, Negro life is seizing upon its first chances for group expression and self-determination. It is—or promises at least to be—a race capital" ("The New Negro" 7). The reality of life for the proletariat, contrasted with the middle class comforts possessed by Locke, indicates a disparity within the thinking of the Renaissance, between the actual, and the imagined living conditions of the urban migrant, made clear previously by Hughes. This gulf of experience tends to

[15] As Fanon succinctly proposes: "Mastery of language affords remarkable power" (9).

validate McKay's relentless transatlantic vagabondage, and supports, paradoxically, Locke's hopes as suggested in *The New Negro*, and underlined by Baker: "Any Afro-American expressive project must find its ultimate validity in a global community—the world, black masses, as it were,—of Africans, both continental and diasporic" (81). To aim for cultural, political and social rejuvenation in such a specific locus as Harlem seems thus impossible, and the necessity to move beyond Harlem, and the American site, to decipher a distinct black identity is paramount.

Wallace Thurman's *Infants of the Spring* shares the authenticity of McKay's account of Harlem in that its fictional representation of urban life is based on Thurman's lived experience. Coming from Salt Lake City to live in 267 West 135th Street in the 1920s, Thurman was a migrant like McKay, and embodied the 'outsider' persona so prevalent in the Harlem Renaissance. He figures as a complex and often dissonant voice, indicative of the diversity of experience which the Harlem Renaissance sought to shape into a knowable black identity: "When he arrived in Harlem, Thurman's identity as an outsider was already deeply engrained. He was homosexual, alcoholic, effeminate, tubercal, and—most prominently in his mind—very, very dark" (Watson 86). This 'outsider' psychology led to a craving, not for inclusion in the dominant society, but, like McKay, Thurman searched for an alternative and authentic identity: "I cannot bear to associate with the ordinary run of people. . . . I have to surround myself with individuals who for the most part are a trifle insane" (qtd. in Watson 88). Thus 'Niggeratti Manor'[16] became a haven for Thurman's eccentricity. For the younger generation of the Harlem Renaissance such as Langston Hughes and Richard Bruce Nugent it became the site of "wild nights . . . in the diversion of the cities of the plains and delirious days fleeing from pink

[16] Niggeratti Manor is the ironically titled house where the artists of *Infants of the Spring* live.

elephants" divulges Geraldyn Dismond, writing in 1922 (qtd. in Watson 89). Niggeratti Manor flaunts all the escapist temptations of McKay's Harlem. This idea of the 'pink elephant' which so taunts the young artists is a construct to which I will return, as it suggest the connection between the Harlem setting and colour consciousness which weighs on Thurman's, and indeed on McKay's, conception of diasporan identity.

As a locus for frivolity, the depiction of Harlem created by McKay and Thurman undermines the official ideals of Harlem as America's black cultural capital of the type advocated by Du Bois and Locke. Even the more liberal of the older generation, such as James Weldon Johnson, had lofty aspirations for Harlem's future:

> I believe that the Negro's advantages and opportunities are greater in Harlem than in any other place in the country, and that Harlem will become the intellectual, the cultural and the financial center for Negroes of the United States, and will exert a vital influence upon all Negro peoples. ("Harlem: The Culture Capital" 311)

There is no hint here of the type of existence depicted in *Infants of the Spring*, or in fact in *Home to Harlem*. Du Bois and Locke, often considered the intellectual architects of the Harlem Renaissance, held views and hopes at variance to McKay and Thurman's ideals for the Renaissance. Locke gazed into the future, speaking in prophetic and spiritual tones, while McKay and Thurman lived and wrote only in the present—albeit an exilic present, for McKay. Locke declared in his seminal essay "The New Negro":

> And certainly, if in our lifetime the Negro should not be able to celebrate his full initiation into American democracy, he can at least,

> on the warrant of these things, celebrate the attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual Coming of Age. (16)

Du Bois had equally high expectations for the Renaissance, based on the work of propagandist art which represented only middle class concerns:

> Thus it is the bounden duty of black America to begin this great work of the creation of beauty, of the preservation of beauty, of the realization of beauty, and we must use in this work all the methods that men have used before . . . . goodness in all its aspects of justice, honor, and right—not for sake of an ethical sanction but as the one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest. ("Criteria of Negro Art" 102-3)

Their sense of a great and equal future in Harlem is weakened by the fatalistic narcissism apparent in *Infants of the Spring.* The impossibility of a future in Harlem which is conveyed in both novels, in artistic or other terms, impacts negatively on the ideals of Du Bois and Locke. It is Ray's departure from Harlem in *Home to Harlem* which symbolises hope, and not his life there, which threatens his identity: "Soon he would become one of the contented hogs in the pigpen of Harlem, getting ready to litter little black piggies (263). . . . The next afternoon the freighter left with Ray signed on as mess boy" (275).

In *Infants of the Spring*, Niggeratti Manor and Harlem are, to an extent, interchangeable. Configured by Levering Lewis as a "revolt against establishment arts" it represents the minority effort at self-definition, and is thus distinct from the structures of white Jazz Age America (*When Harlem* 193). Thurman reflects

McKay's faith in the minority, and the manor acts to buttress these budding artists against the numbing effects of materialism. By extension Harlem is empowered by this sense of protected exclusivity. Decadently evoked, the manor has a strong sensual appeal: "red and black draperies, the red and black bed cover, the crimson wicker chairs, the riotous hook rugs, and Paul's erotic drawings" (Thurman 1). Dedicated to the cultivation of the black artistic imagination, this description initially supports the notion of the manor, and Harlem, as a potential hub for cultural and economic development, and for the issuing forth of a well-defined and supported black identity:

> my present landlady is a visionary. . . . She knew the difficulties experienced by Harlem artists and intellectuals in finding congenial living quarters, and reasoned that by turning this house over to Negroes engaged in creative work, she would make money . . . and . . . profit artistically from the resultant contacts. (6)

Yet as in McKay's novel, these evocations of Harlem are ambivalent. In *Infants of the Spring*, Ray, the central protagonist, and Thurman's fictional alter-ego, doubts the capacity of the manor, or Harlem, to advance a distinctive black identity in the context of white racial dominance:

> Raymond . . . had explored every nook and cranny of that phenomenal Negro settlement. It had, during this period, attained international fame, deservedly. . . . But he was disgusted with the way everyone sought to romanticize Harlem and Harlem Negroes. (17)

Diverging from McKay's attempt to define black Harlem in contradistinction to white America, here the fear that separation will lead to segregation clouds the desire

for distinction. And yet in agreement with McKay, the criticism weighs upon an American society crippled by an inability to move beyond faddish interest in black culture, of the sort satirised in Hughes' documentary of the era: "Non-theatrical, non-intellectual Harlem was an unwilling victim of its own vogue" (229). Ray cautions his white companion, Stephen, against voyeuristic and short term interest in Harlem: "Just because you've . . . become fascinated by a new and bizarre environment, should you lose your reasons Harlem is New York" (19). "Harlem is New York" reads as an attempt to equalise the diversity of cultures in New York, and the complexity here lies in the tendency towards idealising a colour-less Harlem which cannot fall victim to the ennui of white American society in the 1920s: "New York is a world within itself, and every new portion of it which gets discovered by the sophisticates and holds the spotlight, seems more unusual than that which has been discovered before" (18). As James De Jongh suggests:

> In its racial transformation, Harlem had become the embodiment of an idea, for by its very existence Harlem posed a challenge to contemporary limits and cultural terms within which personal being for both blacks and whites were imagined and defined. (15)

Like McKay, Thurman acknowledges the dangers of Harlem becoming a site of brief interest and his fears of white desertion are intensely realised when the previously captivated Stephen announces: "My first impression of Harlem. Transparent juvenilia. Alice in Wonderland, myopic, colour-blind, deaf" (109). In this perversion of the children's tale, and Stephen's spurning of Harlem is his rejection of place: "I

have drunk my fill of Harlem" (123).[17] Sated, he dispenses with a Harlem which catered to his stultified imagination, and in casting it aside so easily, black identity is revealed as disposable on the part of the white America with which it attempted to co-exist. This notion of the short-term interest in black art is frequently and potently used to justify the suggestion of the failure of the Renaissance. Levering Lewis and indeed Gates imply that with the Wall Street Crash and an assuaged appetite for primitive exoticism, there was a blanket withdrawal of all white interest and support in Harlem, and from its cultural products. Undoubtedly the sudden economic depression impacted on general expenditure in the arts and leisure spheres, and yet Hutchinson denies this accusation of fickle rejection:

> many whites interested in the movement continued to support black cultural advancement and civil rights throughout the Depression and beyond—a point perhaps less significant than the fact that continuity of effort can also be found in the development of black arts from the mid-1920s to the emergence of Richard Wright. (*The Harlem Renaissance* 23)

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[17] In another deformation of previous literary traditions, the title, *Infants of the Spring*, indicates Thurman's conception of the Renaissance, when considered in its original form in *Hamlet,* Act One, Scene Three:

> The canker galls the infants of the spring,
> Too oft before their buttons be disclosed,
> And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
> Contagious blastments are most imminent.
> Be wary then; best safety lies in fear.
> Youth to itself rebels, though none else near. (39-44)

Thurman's vision of self-destructive youth troubles the aspirations for cultural rejuvenation.

This defence of the white collective interest is part of the already mentioned attempt by Hutchinson to illustrate the mutually reliant nature of a Renaissance which he describes as one of "intraracial diversity" (16). Interestingly, however, Hutchinson has recently suggested that the Renaissance, in its more specific character and tied to Harlem, did in fact end in the 1930s: "We . . . take the period 1918 to 1937 to reasonably encompass the Harlem Renaissance" and it became merely the "'whipping boy' of later generations seeking to establish their own authority over what black literature could or should be and do" (*The Cambridge Companion* 7).

Where Harold Cruse suggests that those same interracial dynamics emasculated the movement, and Nathaniel Huggins argues that white interference reduced the black capacity to maintain authority over its own culture, Hutchinson suggests the futility of the culturally engrained ideologies which lead to such divided and binary-laden thought: "It is time to recognize that a deeply institutionalized, and very American, cynicism about interracial relationships has obscured our understanding of the nature and achievements of the Harlem Renaissance" (*The Harlem Renaissance* 16). Yet problematically here, neither McKay nor Thurman allow for the eventual successful realisation of Hutchinson's idyll, and both novels tend instead to illustrate the impossibility, and destructiveness, of the interracial nature in their experiences in Harlem, as conveyed by Stephen's brutal rejection and undisguised boredom in *Infants of the Spring*. The aspirations of the N.A.A.C.P., Locke and Du Bois endorse to a degree Hutchinson's argument, but this is overshadowed by the tangible tensions and aggressively potent racial segregation depicted in both novels here discussed. Where McKay, albeit briefly, allows for the possibility of hope in Harlem, Thurman damns Harlem to the realm of functional habitation, devoid of inspiration, so problematising the core aims of the Renaissance

to redefine black identity through the psychological uplifting of Harlem and its inhabitants. Eventually for Thurman's Ray, Harlem cannot nurture the wellsprings of black artistic life: "I'm going to renounce Harlem and all it stands for now. You see, Harlem has become peopled with improbable monsters" (144).

The problematic nature of the concept of self in black identity can be explored in a comparative analysis of *Home to Harlem* and *Infants of the Spring*. Both novels contain figures of the author, and both have autobiographical elements. As I have already suggested, this autobiographical quality enhances the authenticity of the experiences depicted. More than this, it also creates a space in the literary canon for the minority voice. Marcus suggests that for centuries, autobiography as a literary genre excluded minority voices, and she suggests that women, the working classes and the black collective were consciously excluded from the genre by "processes of exclusion and marginalisation in the construction of literary canons" (3). The analogue of female exclusion from studies of autobiography accounts perhaps for McKay and Thurman's attempts to write themselves into their fictionalised Harlem, and in the meeting of autobiography and fiction, a shield is created behind which their complex identities can find protection. The obvious 'doubleness' which underlines this hybridised form of narrative recalls Gates' theories of intertextuality in the black literary tradition, where

> it was to establish a collective black voice through the sublime example of an individual text, and thereby to register a black presence in letters, that most clearly motivated black writers, from the Augustan Age to the Harlem Renaissance. Voices and presences, silence and absence, then, have been the resonating terms of a four part homology. (*The Signifying Monkey* 131)

In both McKay and Thurman's writing we see exhibited the intensity of what is openly vocalised by the characters, but subtly mirrored by the 'silence' and 'absence' of the voice of the invisible author, the masked figures of autobiography who are "literally writing themselves into being through carefully crafted representations in language of the black self" (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 131). Du Boisean 'doubleness' is reflected and a long history of racial persecution imbibed by McKay and Thurman is covertly deployed by central, and vocal, protagonists. This idea of writing oneself into text thus takes on an ultimately and indisputably intertextual nature in the writing of McKay and Thurman, demonstrated by their autobiographical presence in the novel; McKay writes: "There is a little of me in all my chief characters!" (Cooper, *The Passion* 147). This then becomes an extension of the African American displacement within American hegemony, and as Allen suggests of Gates' paradigm of intertextuality in black writing, it is more than a personal bid for self-expression, but a political and consciously cultural action:

> The core of Gates's argument is that African-American writing is double-voiced and self-consciously intertextual in its relation to both standard English and black vernacular discourse which historically has been turned into 'non-speech' by Eurocentric, white cultural values. (168)

Not only do Thurman and McKay write themselves into their novels, they also endow the text with a covert, yet determined bid for recognised and audible black literary independence.

McKay's 1937 autobiography, *A Long Way From Home*, published almost a decade after *Home to Harlem* and ten years before his death, demonstrates a different

protection mechanism, or masking, as Baker might suggest. McKay is again hiding, but this time it is in the shadows of celebrity anecdotes, political manifestos and professional adventures. McKay's more human and personal experiences are somewhat muted, and it is the fictionalised account of his own experiences, as illustrated by Ray, which allows unprecedented access to the passions and emotions of the McKay who struggled in Harlem. As Marcus suggests, the level of 'truthfulness' or self-awareness is often questionable in autobiography, and "very few critics would demand that autobiographical truth should be literally verifiable—this would after all, undermine the idea that the truth of self is more complex than 'fact'" (3). McKay and Thurman thus communicate more "autobiographical veracity and sincerity" in their fictional representations because, freed from possible social judgement and ensuing repudiation, the inner 'self' is more 'truthfully' illustrated in the novel than in the autobiography (Marcus 3). That which Marcus defines as "autobiographical intention" is paradoxically more palpable in McKay and Thurman's fictional accounts of their experiences (3). In this hybrid form of literature where boundaries of fiction and autobiography become blurred, is an unrivalled sincerity which Marcus suggests is "an inner compulsion to write of the self, and . . . the autobiographical act must involve a degree of difficulty and struggle, both in grasping the self and in communicating it" (3-4). Marcus and Gates thus participate in a discourse which emerges to indicate the inescapable potency of the autobiographical voice within the work of fiction. Referring explicitly to Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, but equally applicable to McKay, Gates suggests:

> such a blending of distinctly writerly or speakerly voices . . . produces for the first time in African-American literary tradition a resolution of

> the cardinal challenge facing African-American authors. The resolution is characteristically double-voiced, merging without negating white and black discourses into what might be styled a hybrid voice beyond any notion of singular or stable identity. (qtd. in Allen 171)

In McKay's novel, Ray, a surrogate for the author, quests for a redefined identity separate from colonial ideologies and white stereotypes of the black intellectual. Ray's self-imposed social segregation seems to isolate him from even minority or ethnic group identification, and his sense of alienation aptly conveys McKay's own troubled sense of identity. As Cooper suggests in his foreword to *Home to Harlem:* "McKay expressed . . . his race's deepest emotions as a besieged, and tormented minority within Western civilization. At the same time he also proclaimed himself a universalist, a Communist internationalist, and a free spirit" (xiv). This sense of dislocation serves to highlight the wider experience of alienation and exile experienced by the diaspora in Harlem, and the paradox of being alienated within Western society underlines the complexity of the diasporic subject. To exist outside a culture is to enable even the creation of a relational 'other' culture, yet to be displaced within culture is to be constrained by boundaries which act as confining forces, not reference points for group identification. The exile labours to achieve an independent identity within the very society which represses the expression of that identity.

Central to the exploration of Ray's crisis of identity is the fact that it occurs in the in-between, travelling space of the railroad, away from the myriad distractions of Harlem. The Haitian (and so doubly alienated) Ray is the embodiment of exile, and although united by colour with the men of the railroad, this is not a connection

premised on racial solidarity. Douglas's exploration of the blues culture of African American musical history supports McKay's exploration of transience and movement. Ray's vagabondage mirrors the lyrical and frank blues songs which as Douglas suggests, capture the hope, disappointment and quandary of the oppressed black in America: "The blues person was always 'runnin' around' or riding the rails; mobility was the only solution to the implacable paradoxes of liberty" (407). Ray fully embodies this spirit of mobility, and ultimately, in keeping with the thematic cultural considerations of the blues songs of the era, Ray engages with the migrant lifestyle endorsed by the music. His only feelings of belonging are evoked by his dreams of his Haitian home: "Home thoughts if you can make them soft and sweet and misty-beautiful enough, can sometimes snare sleep. . . . All the flowering things he loved . . . All the tropic warm lilies and roses. . . . a green grandeur in the heart of space" (152-3).

We see here a projection of McKay's delight in the pastoral imagery of his own childhood, which, as will be discussed in Chapter Three in more detail, is complexly interwoven into his literary productivity. Here, as elsewhere in his work, McKay suggests the importance of the development of an authentic and genuine black literature and identity. Capturing the utopian qualities of a pre-colonial landscape is a recurring reference point in McKay's work; connecting this to his transient political allegiance to Garvey's Back to Africa Movement, the centrality of fertile imagery in his fiction can also point to the intersection of African and Caribbean cultures, which is again explored in more depth in Chapter Three. African and Caribbean loci are conceived as havens of natural fecundity, resilient in the face of imperialist avarice, and thus the island heritage and African ancestry of the globally dispersed black diaspora merge to form a redefined black national identity

which can encompass qualities of the urban North, the tropical Caribbean, and the landscape of African inheritance. Ironically, and historically, imperialist avarice was, of course, stimulated by desire for the natural resources in these islands. As demonstrated by Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, colonial interest was rarely materially disinterested. As Marlow narrates the often grim horrors of the colonial voyage into the 'heart of darkness,' the very real and profitable possession of ivory overshadows the noble conquest of the colonial 'missionaries.' Marlow attempts to feel a part of "the great cause of these high and just proceedings" which hopes to enlighten the savage natives (23). Yet the undercurrent of doubt, and repetitious reference to ivory throughout the novel leads to a frank revelation of the true intention which underlies an imperialist ideology:

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. (10)

Racism and greed thus shadow the colonial intention of enlightenment and redemption for the ignorant, and a motif of plunder and theft becomes perhaps a more appropriate representation of imperialism: "To speak plainly, we raided the country" (Conrad 80). McKay rejected white fears of black Africa, and responding to H.G. Wells' 1918 *League of Free Nations*, he repudiated the sensationalist propaganda which rationalised and justified the colonial plunder of Africa. McKay took particular offence at Wells' suggestion that "the most obvious danger of Africa is the militarization of the black" (Wells qtd. in McKay, *ALWFH* 121). In response, McKay, in a more political mood, pointed to both the facetiousness and inherent racism of Wells' comment: "But he should remember that I am a Negro and think

that the greatest danger of Africa is not the militarization of the black, but the ruthless exploitation of the African by the European" (*ALWFH* 122).

Jamaica, too, suffered at the hands of colonial manipulation of the banana trade, which until the interference of American Lorenzo Dow Baker in the late 1870s, was almost singularly a peasant crop cultivated in the eastern parishes of Jamaica. As Winston James recounts, the island was organised into small and manageable peasant holdings which allowed for subsistence and independence (*Holding Aloft the Banner* 17). Yet as is a frequent effect of colonial presence in the Caribbean and Africa, an opportunity arose for Baker to maximise financially, and minimise native independence, thus satisfying dual colonial concerns. As James suggests of the capitalist Baker, he "had friends in high places: he was aided and abetted by the colonial state" which encouraged "large land holdings in the British Caribbean," thus forcefully excluding the impecunious peasantry into dependence upon the wealthy land owners, and reducing all possibilities for independent peasant land holdings (*Holding Aloft* 17). Baker managed to monopolise the banana trade, while impacting enormously on the Jamaican agricultural and economic patterns. James statistically illustrates the economic shift following the manoeuvres of Baker, showing the reduction in labour in agriculture from 1871 to 1911 by 9.5%, while domestic service rose by 4.6%, thus structuring society into a more comfortable shape to support colonialism (*Holding Aloft* 22). As founder of the Boston Fruit Company, which later and infamously became the United Fruit Company, Baker profited through devious manipulation of the peasantry, by reducing labour expenses and singularly benefitting from his dominance in the banana trade, as exporting the bananas to the United States proved.

So much is the symbol of the United Fruit Company engrained in the history and culture of Jamaica, and, indeed, the Caribbean and Latin America more generally, that McKay casually refers to it as his mode of transport to the United States in 1912: "I should leave by a boat of the United Fruit Company's line from Port Antonio" (Morris, *My Green Hills* 86). McKay came to America aboard an export ship, a resonant symbol of economic expatriation. An export, or a product of Jamaica, McKay's very existence was deemed more profitable and viable in America, and the pattern of immigration from the island was, ironically, stimulated by the colonial control of the island's economy, which led to widespread and long-term unemployment and diminished opportunity for the younger generation. To leave his native island on the UFC ship reflects the enormous impact of colonialism in Jamaica. It is no less ironic that McKay should have left Jamaica on the advice of the expatriate Englishman, Walter Jekyll. Jekyll, who had been denied residency in India, and found home for his radicalism in Jamaica, felt that McKay should learn the skills of the land, so he could return and improve its fertility: "Mr. Jekyll thought that if I went to America and received a good education in agriculture I could also be an instructor. That would also keep me close to the peasantry and their aspirations and ways of thinking" (Morris, *My Green Hills* 82). Jekyll's intentions may have been benign, and his belief in McKay's poetic abilities genuine, yet their relationship was hardly an equitable one. Later, and undeniably spoken with more than a hint of sarcasm, Walter Jekyll declared to McKay: "English gentlemen have always liked their peasants. It's the ambitious middle classes that we cannot tolerate" (qtd. in Cooper, *Claude McKay* 29).

Significantly however, it is in the urban North American context where McKay's Ray fails to identify with the black collective: "These men claimed kinship with him.

They were black like him. . . . He ought to love them. . . . Yet he loathed every soul in that great barrack-room" (153). Visibly Ray can connect himself to these men, yet psychologically he is as isolated from them as he is from the white American majority: "Ray felt that he was conscious of being black and impotent, so correspondingly, each marine down in Hayti must be conscious of being white and powerful" (154). His sense of exile is amplified by the abjection of his place of birth. McKay underlines this feeling of impotence and psychological displacement as Ray conceives of whiteness as "a passport to glory" (154). Toying with notions of freedom of movement, a glaring contrast emerges of the distinct freedom possessed by white men, while black men recall their slave origins and transatlantic passage where their blackness was merely a 'passport' to enslavement. This dichotomy highlights the glaring disparity which pervaded the American notion of national identity. The black diaspora is figured by Ray as a lost collective amidst the

> perfect Occidentals and investors in that grand business called civilisation . . . in whose pits sweated and snored, like the cooks, all the black and brown hybrids and mongrels, simple earth-loving animals, without aspirations toward national unity and racial arrogance. (154-5)

However, here is the core of Ray's quandary. He provides evidence that no ideology can achieve a fixed identity of 'national' qualities for the black diaspora. Yet Ray's own use of 'national' is too restrictive when reconstructing definitions of diaspora identity. Ray's vision is constricted by white America and it interferes with his recollections of Haiti, originally a place in which he felt "the son of a nation" (155). In response to one-dimensional conceptions of national identity, McKay stimulates notions of a transnational identity, which could encompass the myriad

diasporic voices of black exile in the U.S. McKay, that is, recognises the need for a 'reworlded' New World African diasporan identity. Ray avoids the assimilationist tendencies of America, and maintains allegiance to his own Haitian cultural inheritance:

> But he was not entirely of them. He possessed another language and literature that they knew not of. And some day Uncle Sam would let go of his island and he would escape from the clutches of that magnificent monster of civilization. (155)

Ray's reference to his native language and literature affirms the foundation for cultural identity, and yet from these he is geographically and emotionally displaced. As an educated Haitian living in the U.S., he is denied a 'passport-defined' national identity and so McKay implies the need for a redefined inclusive conception of diasporan identity. Ray conceives of himself as a "misfit" because he does not fit into the rigidly defined mould of American nationalism: "I am a misfit . . . a misfit with my little education and constant dreaming" (274). Ray's engagement with literary theorists and philosophers facilitates his intellectual advancement and yet socially he is forced to endure the horrors of the Pittsburgh rail road squalour. The gulf between education and lived experience in Ray's life illustrates how potentially tortuous was the educated black life. America's constitutional ideals of equality for all men are undermined, thus weakening the conception and desirability of national belonging. It is Ray's condition which permits McKay's novel to advocate a reconfiguration of black (trans)nationalism.

Throughout *Infants of the Spring*, Thurman is preoccupied with colour consciousness and its relationship to identity and in contrast to *Home to Harlem*,

Thurman's protagonist Ray deems minority identity harmful to the individual. Douglas suggests that Thurman's denial of colour and racial division in art is a conscious act of self-promotion: "For the New Negro to allow race to be the dominant category was to permit whites to call the shots" and he insisted on "deferring to nothing but superior talent," albeit frequently white 'superior talent' (343). McKay's Ray experiences involuntary isolation from the black minority because of his education, but Thurman's Ray actively lives apart from minority identity, and denies the possibility of equality in America until complete assimilation of the black diaspora into the white majority occurs. The 'pink elephant' referred to by Dismond figures perhaps as the troubling issue of colour consciousness which pervades all considerations of black artistry traditionally associated with the Harlem Renaissance. It echoes too Du Boisean rhetoric of the 'veil' which, in the Southern context, shrouds, and ultimately limits black individual possibility, as it forms a barrier between the white world of opportunity, and the black world of oppression: "foreordained to walk within the Veil . . . we build about them walls so high, and hang between them and the light a veil so thick, that they shall not even think of breaking through" (Du Bois, *The Souls* 56). Yet Thurman's Ray, and his Niggeratti Manor peers, deny the impact of ethnicity on their art. In contrast to *Home to Harlem*, the appreciation of the 'primitive' or ancestral in art is reduced by assimilationist philosophies: "I'm not an African . . . I'm an American and a perfect product of the melting pot" (155).

Thurman's delineation of colour consciousness is illustrated by the binary figures of the black Ray and white Scandinavian Stephen. Both struggle with their colour in Harlem, neither feeling a part of any dominant society. Ray's contempt for the racial separation espoused by white America is clear: "And you have no idea how they

sympathize with me, a poor benighted Negro," while Stephen's discomfort in Harlem signifies his personal awareness of the racial divide: "I wanted to camouflage my white skin, and assume some protective coloration" (3-4). His assertion of visible displacement confounds McKay's Ray and his ideas of the white man's universal sense of superiority. Yet undermining this contradiction is Thurman's depiction of Samuel, whose white 'nobility' and empathy with the black collective is shown to be vainly and shallowly conceived, in a bid to 'fit' into the role of a minority hero: "To prepare himself for his future glory, he dived recklessly into the many cross currents of the radical movement" (12). Samuel quests for recognition amongst the vulnerable, figuring as an emblem of imperialism plundering minorities in search of greatness: "He was going to be a rebellious torchbearer" (12). Inevitably his facetious objectives fail, and his Victorian sensibilities serve to emphasise the weakness of his vocalised ideals: "More often than not he considered his capitalist opponents in a more favorable light than he did his radical allies" (13). Samuel represents white America as depicted by McKay, infiltrating Harlem for frivolous purposes, while Stephen represents the attempt, and the failure, to forge inter-racial relationships in Harlem. McKay's belief in the power of the minority to cultivate identity, and the need to 'use' the minority to build transnational identity is undermined by Thurman's Ray as he erases colour distinction:

> It made no difference between them that one was black and the other white. There was something deeper than mere surface color which drew them together, something more vital and lasting than the shallow attraction of racial opposites. (16)

Inter-racial relationships are not visible in *Home to Harlem*, and McKay strengthens notions of a diaspora identity in a transnational context by allowing for distinction empowered by recognition of the value of diversity within the black collective. However Thurman focuses solely on placing the individual in and as a part of a generalised society, and denounces efforts to forge any kind of distinct counter-hegemonic identity through minority unity: "You should realise that Negroes are much like any other human beings. They have the same social, physical and intellectual diversions" (19). He creates a vision of a society where colour 'should' be insignificant in human relationships. Thurman here perhaps alludes to then influential Boasian anthropology, which aimed to define people not by race, because of its unreliable characteristics, but by culture, which allows for the impact of physical environments on the individual, and denies racial and biological conditioning. As Hutchinson suggests: "Boas developed his revolutionary contention that race and culture are independent of each other" (*The Harlem Renaissance* 65). This then allows for the possibility of the type of 'colour-less' culture desired by Thurman's Ray.

Yet this attempt at social equality fails for Thurman's Ray. Both Thurman's and McKay's novels indicate the necessity for an exclusive black identity which is inclusive of colour consciousness and nourishes a distinctly transnational cultural and political identity. Assimilation and individualism fail the black migrant in a Harlem circumscribed by white America, and so these novels implicitly suggest the necessity for a new and ultimately redefined black transnational identity, which is strengthened by diversity in the American context, and which accommodates the diasporic voice of the black collective. In *Infants of the Spring*, negative perceptions of colour threaten individuals, and devastation follows for Paul Arbian, a thinly

disguised Richard Bruce Nugent, as he feels the inherent limitations of his race in 1920s America, again pointing to the need to refigure black identity. Arbian "never recovered from the shock of realizing that no matter how bizarre a personality he may develop, he will still be a Negro subject to snubs from certain people" (32).

Supporting this desire to recreate black identity outside relational conceptions is the illustration of the shallowly developed relationship between Thurman's Ray and Stephen, as cracks in their bond begin to emerge. Stephen is irritated by the way in which Ray focuses solely on individual ideals and rejects race as a factor in identity:

> Yes, race to you . . . means nothing. You stand on a peak alone, superior, nonchalant, unconcerned. . . . Illusions about Negroes you have none. Your only plea is that they accept themselves and be accepted by others as human beings. (33)

Denying accusations of ignorance, Ray chooses instead ideologically to situate himself outside the social boundaries; the impossibility of his isolated aspiration depicted by Thurman serves to strengthen still further McKay's faith in minority unity. Thurman's Ray is idealistic, yet too selfishly inclined to contribute to social amelioration:

> I know I'm a Negro and so does everyone else. I certainly cannot pass nor can I effect change. . . . I rather love myself as I am, and am quite certain that I have as much chance to make good as anyone else, regardless of my color. (33)

Ray identifies colour as a limiting force that stunts one's social power, and yet it can be suggested that it is in his individualism that his impotence lies, not in the

possession or expression of racial inheritance. In his failure to subscribe to any collective ideology, Ray is further oppressed by the dominant society.[18] "I'll be damned if I join in any crusade to save the Negro masses," declares Ray, as he makes his personal politics clear: "I'm only interested in the individual" (42). His refusal to align himself with any group identity is eventually conveyed as destructive, and the novel actively promotes the need for a defined black identity, supported by the diasporic collective. His failure to succeed in his artistic ambitions intensifies the binary of weakened individualism and strengthened collective minority identity and so further supports McKay and Thurman's insistence on the restructuring of black identity. His morals are unwavering, but are compromised in the context of 1920s racism by his independent tendencies: "Could not Negroes and whites ever get together and act like normal individuals or must there always be this awareness of color?" (57) 'Normal' here suggests colour-less, thus the weakness of his sense of identity lies precisely in his rejection of difference. His rejection of colour, when compared with Ray's conscious struggle with his race in *Home to Harlem*, demonstrates the centrality of race in conceptions of identity, and simultaneously allows us to recognise that in its problematised state, colour-consciousness also includes the potential of embracing diversity and building a

[18] Thurman's Ray praises the efforts of the 'self-made' individual in commercial America:

> Over in Staten Island, there is a Negro who has made a fortune in the trucking business. . . . He belongs to the chamber of commerce. And he can hardly write his name. What's the reason? He has money. He's an individualist. And that is the only type of Negro who will ever escape the shroud of color, those who go on about their own business, and do what they can in the best way they can, whether it be in business or in art. (141)

unique consciousness and diasporan identity both in and beyond the American context.

Thurman's characters debate their African ancestry, and their tendency is to dismiss it as harmful. In *Infants of the Spring* Eustace's rejection of his heritage as primitive and shameful depicts the middle class disgust for working class Harlem's delight in the inheritance of black folk music and spirituals: "I'm no slave and I won't sing slave music if I never have a concert" (66). The central debate of the Harlem Renaissance and, indeed, of later critical discourse surrounding primitivist-tinged modernism versus bourgeois representations of black life in literature impacts on both Thurman and McKay's work. In the depiction of working class and bohemian Harlem we see the early visions of Muthyala's theory of cultural distinction in the 1920s diasporic literature. Accepted by the Talented Tenth or not, this representation of the diasporic proletariat epitomises the importance of cultural depictions in literature which establish a distinctive and recognisable black transnational identity. The need to consider black culture separately from white America is not only an effort to recognise the value of the African inheritance of the diaspora, but also a longer term 'reworlding' of cultural identity which removes it from reductive comparisons of the black and white middle class. The intrusion of white middle class America into Harlem, represented by Samuel and Stephen in Thurman's *Infants of the Spring*, figures as a further threat to black diversity as it further imposes its middle class control on black life in North America. Their brief fascination will lead to rejection inevitably, and their fickleness impinges on collective black self-esteem:

> Negrotarians . . . have regimented their sympathies and fawn around Negroes with a cry in their hearts and a superiority bug in their head.

> It's a new way to get a thrill, a new way to merit distinction in the community—this cultivating Negroes. It's a sure way to bolster up their weak ego and cut a figure. Negroes being what they are makes this sort of person possible. (88)

This disturbing symbiosis directly links white cultural advancement to black suppression and implicates the white 'Negrotarian'[19] in an exploitative position. Thurman's Ray situates control of identity in the remit of individual choice: "Negroes are a slave race and so they'll remain until assimilated. Individuals will arise and escape on the ascending ladder of their own ability. The others will remain what they are. Their superficial progress means nothing" (89). Yet here the erosion of black cultural possessions contradicts McKay's Ray's faith in culture to bolster the minority identity of the displaced diasporic subject. Where Ray in *Home to Harlem* draws strength from native culture, Thurman's Ray appears to yield to and grant control to the dominant forces of hegemony: "To talk of an African heritage among American Negroes *is* unintelligent. . . . Your primitive instincts among all but the extreme proletariat have been ironed out. You're standardized Americans" (157). The assimilationist tendencies remarked upon by Muthyala are represented. Although differing in message, both novels present the need to restructure conceptions of a threatened African American identity, removed from white control.

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[19] Levering Lewis writes:

> Irrepressible Zora Neale Hurston, the Howard University coed, had a genius for coining terms. . . . 'Negrotarians' was Hurston's word for whites who specialized in Afro-American uplift. They came in an almost infinite variety. There were Negrotarians who were earnest humanitarians, and those who were merely fascinated. (*When Harlem* 98)

So dangerous was this white influence that Ray, in *Infants of the Spring*, predicts that the enslavement of the black diaspora by white intrusion in Harlem will require epic and historic liberation: "It is going to be necessary to have another emancipation to deliver the emancipated Negro from a new kind of slavery" (120).

Demonstrating white rejection of Harlem in *Infants of the Spring* is Stephen's repudiation of the black collective: "I shudder—and this will astound you—if I have to shake hands with a Negro. I have lived recently in a suddenly precipitated fear that I have become unclean because of my association" (124). Black Harlem leaves Stephen feeling diseased, and Thurman presents the dangers of white America's presence in Harlem which results in an eventual "emotional hangover" which is reminiscent of, if less harmful than, the malaise experienced by McKay's speaker in "The Desolate City" (120). Stephen brands the inhabitants of Niggeratti Manor "pretentious . . . stupid . . . festering gumboils" who "nauseate" him (124). Attempting to flatter Ray, Stephen suggests Ray appeals to him precisely because "you never have been and never will be a Negro to me" (124). Stephen thus denies Ray a viable identity, and so dehumanising is this statement that McKay's belief in black solidarity is empowered in the light of white America's advancing authority. To say that Ray is not 'a Negro' is to segregate him from a community and diaspora which share a heritage, and although Ray has faith in the individual alone, it is still a violation of his existence to strip him of this potential affiliation. He figures then as devoid of identity, outside black and white America, thus utterly ineffective. Ray suggests that the black artists of Niggeratti Manor aim to "lose our racial identity . . . and be acclaimed for our achievements" and yet it is a motto which is beginning to fail in reality (129). His belief in the possibility of 'colour-less' art and 'colour-less' America is contradicted by his repudiation of white interference in Harlem: "I'm sick

of all you god damned twentieth century abolitionists . . . lily livered bastards that come up here seeking thrills and pleasures" (131). Admitting to the white impact upon black Harlem frees Ray, in a sense, from the numbing burden of his colour-less ideologies which imprisoned black identity within white America. Yet ultimately, he still craves assimilation, due to the weariness of race-consciousness and its arduous efforts:

> Do you know, Steve, that I'm sick of both whites and blacks? I'm sick of discussing the Negro problem. . . . I'm sick of whites who think I can't talk about anything else, and of Negroes who think I shouldn't talk about anything else. . . . My problem is a personal one. (139)

Ray acknowledges the central difficulty of black life in America, and yet appears to yield to assimilation because it presents the possibility of an end to race-consciousness, and allows individual fulfilment:

> Anything that will make white people and colored people come to the conclusion that they are all human . . . all with the same faults and virtues, the sooner amalgamation can take place and the Negro problem will cease to be a blot on American civilization. (140)

This craving for inclusion is solved by the suggestion of eroding diversity in the name of 'American' identity. Ray cannot conceive of an American identity broad enough to include black identity, and considers its disappearance as the key to progress, as then "there won't be this mass of alien people, retarding the progress of this country because they are being inculcated with complexes which can only wrack havoc" (140). As Muthyala suggests, assimilation denies authentic identity, and here we see how Ray is so warped by American racism that he sees it as beneficial, not

oppressive. So subjugated is he that he cannot acknowledge the possibility of the power of black identity, and so the novel serves to simultaneously criticise America and create a space for a reconsideration of African diasporic transnationalism.

Where Thurman presents the impossibility of an 'African American' identity fully and equally realised in the American context, McKay presents an alternative aspiration, as his characters leave Harlem for diasporic transience and intercultural encounter. McKay's personal migrancy from Jamaica to the U.S. in 1912 and subsequently to England in 1919 was the stimulus for his intensified sense of the pertinence of group affiliation and minority solidarity. Although disappointingly unlike his colonised boyhood expectations, England endowed McKay's newly unsettled racial awareness with leftist politics: "Now that I had grown up in America and was starting off to visit England, I realized that I wasn't excited any more about the items I had named in my juvenile poem" (*ALWFH* 59). McKay's sojourn in England from 1919 to 1921 was partly spent working at Sylvia Pankhurst's socialist newspaper *The Worker's Dreadnought* in London, and McKay became acquainted with the tenets of Marxism, Socialism, and Communism.[20] In his role as

[20] Gary Holcomb's exploration in his 2007 book *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance* contrasts McKay's FBI file with his autobiographical hesitancy to divulge the depth of his Communist involvement and suggests McKay always consciously evaded aligning himself with the Communist movement explicitly in his writing, as the scrutiny directed upon a black communist in the 1930s and 1940s would have been increasingly intense (24). McKay wrote in a letter which is archived in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library to Reuben Gilmore in 1941: "After I visited Russia I was less enthusiastic about the Communists and upon leaving I grew altogether non-political. And after Stalin came to power I lost all interest in the Soviets. . . . I have no use for the crack-brained sentimental idiots who insist that the Russian Dictatorship is better than the Nazi dictatorship, because it does not persecute Jews and other

investigative journalist he witnessed the plight of ill-treated white and black dockers and striking saw-mill workers in London's East End. McKay's formative experience of Jamaican group life inevitably contributed to his sympathetic perspective of the workers' plight, as his belief in the minority was all the time fermenting and his faith in workers' movements was evolving: "It is with the proletarian revolutionists of the world that my whole spirit revolts. . . . I see no other way of upward struggle for colored peoples, but the way of the working-class movement, ugly and harsh though some of its phases may be" (Cooper, *The Passion* 58). Encountering for the first time the left-wing Marxists at the International Socialist Club, England became for McKay the ideal site to extend his understanding of the political radicalism he first encountered at the *Liberator* offices in Greenwich Village: "If there was no romance for me in London, there was plenty of radical knowledge" (*ALWFH* 69). McKay's portrait of England's grim character contributes to an appreciation of his cultivation of transnational diasporic affiliation, finding that the English "as a whole were strangely unsympathetic people, as coldly chilling as their English fog" (ALWFH 67). Neither American racism nor British formality were alien to the Jamaican McKay, nor unmanageable, and yet he finds affinity only in radical circles which exist on the margins of mainstream Anglo-Saxon culture.

Its ability to accommodate the New World African diaspora in a significantly hostile environment was a core value of radicalism to the exile, and the Socialists' welcoming of the oppressed and marginalised established a framework for McKay's literary rendering of empowered peripheral communities in his later fiction: "The

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minorities." In 1944, McKay wrote also a letter to Harold Jackman, telling of his devotion to Catholicism, which stimulated him to work as an advisor to Bishop Sheil in Chicago on the threat of Communism to America's Black population.

International Club was full of excitement, . . . foreigners formed the majority of the membership. The Jewish element was the largest. . . . There were also Czechs, Italians, and Irish nationalists[21], and rumours of spies" (*ALWFH* 68). McKay repeatedly referred to his feelings of solidarity with the Irish, and his experience of colonialism and rural life endows his inter-racial sentiments of support with a heightened level of veracity:

> I think I understand the Irish. My belonging to a subject race entitles me to some understanding of them. And then I was born and reared a peasant; the peasant's passion for the soil possesses me, and it is one of the strongest passions in the Irish revolution. (Cooper, *The Passion* 59)

Garvey, too, owing to his colonial childhood in Jamaica, felt a similar affiliation. As Colin Grant suggests, "for Garvey, 'Irish' was virtually another name for Negro. . . . Sinn Féiners' agitation for home rule served as a blueprint for Garvey's evolving philosophy of Black Nationalism" (198). A sensitivity to the global situation of oppression crossed racial lines, and McKay elucidates an understanding of the absolute necessity to unite workers on a level other than through the limited

[21] McKay's participation in a Sinn Féin rally in Trafalgar Square in 1920 in support of Terence McSwiney's hunger strike earned him the nicknames "Black Murphy" and "Black Irish"; he writes: "For that day at least I was filled with the spirit of Irish nationalism—although I am black!" (Cooper, *The Passion* 58). Jenkins delineates the links between McKay and Irish Nationalism, and explicates how it supported McKay's understanding of the need for black diasporan solidarity: "His political position owed much to his association with Irish radicals, just as his writing, from the early dialect poems to his later novels, demonstrates his cultural affiliation with Ireland" ("'Black Murphy': Claude McKay and Ireland" 288).

boundaries of national associations, a concept he transposes to the port side locus of Marseilles in his second novel, *Banjo.* This also functions to broaden the Africentric socialism of Cyril Brigg's African Blood Brotherhood, of which McKay was a member while in New York.[22] As Cooper proposes, his early years at the *Liberator*, and indeed in England, were "a time during which McKay's literary development and political commitments would mature together in a tense, unstable conjunction" (*Claude McKay* 103). Witnessing the redundant divisions between Irish and English workers alerted McKay to the dearth in international worker unity, and inevitably led him to his personal extension of Communist policies in the early 1920s:

> And the Irish workers hate the English. It may not sound nice in the ears of an 'infantile left' communist to hear that the workers of one country hate the workers of another. It isn't beautiful propaganda. Nevertheless, such a hatred does exist. (Cooper, *The Passion* 59)

McKay's radical sympathies were profoundly engaged by the counter-hegemonic Irish movements he encountered in London, and that which A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen were proposing in their socialist *Messenger* magazine in 1919 in the confines of black New York radiated perhaps more potently in the British context, for McKay, as the transnational alliance of the globally oppressed became apparent. This period is also widely viewed by critics as one in which McKay's conception of

[22] Cooper suggests that McKay's denial of involvement with the ABB is countered by the Russian translator's introduction to McKay's *Negroes in America* (1923): "the available evidence suggests that McKay's political activities within the African Blood Brotherhood may have been influential in moving that organization into the Communist orbit. . . . it indicates that McKay was very likely instrumental within the African Blood Brotherhood in promoting its merger with the Communist Party of America" (*Claude McKay* 177).

Pan-African cultural possibilities was nourished. McKay's early cognisance of the role African diasporic affiliation could play in transnational identity formation is indisputable: he would apply the principles of Marxist and Communist theory to his motley and African diasporan collective in the fictional context of Marseilles in *Banjo.*

His engagement with the politics of the subjugated Irish in Britain facilitated his growing awareness of the importance of group resistance, and it is perhaps symbolically significant that he locates, in fiction, his fully developed minority collective in France. He envisages an undifferentiated Anglo-Saxon hostility as he binds the U.S. and Britain in their inability to support a variegated populace. His flight from Harlem to Marseilles elucidates his insistence on intercultural encounter and the pertinence of the peripatetic life to minority life and survival. Along with his experience in Britain, McKay was undoubtedly influenced in his socialist thought by Lenin's early awareness of global capitalist oppression and the Russian sympathy for the plight of the New World African:

> the vanguard of the Russian workers and the national minorities, now set free from imperial oppression, are thinking seriously about the fate of the oppressed classes . . . not the least of the oppressed that fill the thoughts of the new Russia are the Negroes of America and Africa. (Cooper, *The Passion* 99)

His trip to Russia was initially energised by the elation there in 1922 and he witnesses the fervour of rejuvenated worker philosophies, which recognised the torment of fellow workers who were still exploited:

> I was welcomed thus as a symbol, as a member of the great American Negro group—kin to the unhappy black slaves of European Imperialism in Africa—that the workers of Soviet Russia, rejoicing in their freedom, were greeting through me. (Cooper, *The Passion* 100)

McKay, however, perhaps engaged with the Russian passion on exactly that level, the symbolic level, as it becomes apparent in later years that he was more comfortable with the literary evocation of minority affiliation than in political activism, as his novels testify. Cooper proposes that McKay "could never give himself wholly to political work" (*The Passion* 183). However the distinction need not be drawn so sharply between prose and politics, and albeit a reluctant propagandist, McKay creates in *Banjo* a manifesto for the diasporic and globally displaced New World African, beyond the bounds of American socio-political hegemony.

Chapter Two

Banjo (1929)

Chapter Two

"Well, you just have to find out where Negroes are and you have to give up the idea that culture exists in neat pockets. Culture is exchange" (Ellison qtd. in West 41).

Claude McKay's 1929 novel, *Banjo,* both pre-empts and is a working model of Ralph Ellison's theory of cultural encounter. The seafaring community of 1920s Marseilles depicted in *Banjo* embodies the transnationality reflected in the author's own lived experience. The migratory encounters which suggest the transnational alliance and which are delineated in the semi-autobiographical novel indicate the continued necessity for the exiled McKay to reconceptualise identity in the wake of global black dislocation. Moving out of the American site is suggestive of McKay's cognisance that a genuinely transnational identity can only be sought beyond the U.S., or any bordered site, and his actual and fictional transatlantic move to the south of France interweaves personal peripatetic motivations and a particularly unpredictable narrative sequentiality which is an integral part of McKay's trilogy of exile and return. Jahan Ramazani argues that a "translocal poetics" is "neither localist nor universalist, neither nationalist nor vacantly globalist" and so "highlights the dialogic intersections—sometimes tense and resistant, sometimes openly assimilative" which emerge when diverse cultures meet and exchange in spaces which accommodate transnational encounter (43). Although McKay is not his subject, Ramazani's theory addresses McKay's central theme and preoccupation in *Banjo,* as McKay figures Marseilles as a space, which, in its geopolitical liminality accommodates counter-hegemonic moments of alliance and fraternity among the dispossessed. It is its quality of geographic and ideological marginality which

paradoxically supports a 'motley' and overwhelmingly international collective, despite their social and political liminality.

McKay's figuring of the seafaring community in this context speaks to Paul Gilroy's theory of the Black Atlantic—a theoretical framework central to this consideration of *Banjo.* There is a recognition in the novel of the inherent value of social and cultural diversity for the evolution of transnational affiliation in Marseilles, and in *Banjo* there is the cultivation of communities on the periphery of mainstream society, of the sort later theorised by Edward Said, who argues that:

> Cultures are always made up of mixed, heterogeneous, and even contradictory discourses, never more themselves in a sense than when they are not just being themselves, in other words not being in that state of unattractive and aggressive affirmativeness into which they are twisted by authoritarian figures. (Said xv)

Said's assertion may be used to interrogate McKay's multifarious society of vagabonds and panhandlers who resist assimilation into any hegemonic culture. The analysis of 'culture' as typically variegated acknowledges the particular experience of transnational interaction and engagement accommodated in the port.

Ramazani's allusion to the local and universal in his figuring of diasporic exchange creates the idea of two different spaces in between which culture and creativity occurs. Yet the binarism of these sites can be bridged by supplementing Ramazani's construction with Gilroy's theory, which links these figurative sites in a re-conceptualisation of the Atlantic space. Although he does not discuss McKay, Gilroy's theory has a particular relevance when applied to *Banjo*: Gilroy re-imagines the transatlantic middle passage so relevant in the New World African's memory,

which is apposite to the novel's exploration of black seafaring and 'routed' transnational communities. Gilroy acknowledges the movement which occurs in the spaces 'in-between' the global and the local, and through which culture and diasporas evolve, much as McKay illustrates the community which can emerge in the liminal and polymorphic port space. The peripheral setting chosen by McKay as a sequel to urban and socially marginal Harlem presages Homi Bhabha's postcolonial construct of a metaphorical 'third space,' in which McKay locates a collective of vagabonds who engage socially for their mutual survival, unconcerned with capitalism and the affairs of the metropolis. They are, in fact, sheltered from social hegemony in this marginal port locus where, for the seafarer, life begins: "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing" (Heidegger qtd. in Bhabha 1). Ray of *Home to Harlem* and now *Banjo* believes that "He had never known a seaman who really loved the deep sea. . . . The real lure of the sea was beyond in the port of call" (McKay, *Banjo* 70). With the weight of the memory of the transatlantic slave trade and the accompanying movement which is intrinsically interwoven into the 'plot-less' narrative of *Banjo,* there emerges the central motif from which McKay creates a revitalised meaning and identity for diaspora.[23] *Banjo* imbricates sea and land, stasis and flux, disunity and community, which facilitates the cultivation of a transnational collective. As Glissant proposes: "Diversity needs the presence of peoples, no longer as objects to be swallowed up, but with the intention of creating a new relationship" (98). The sense of mutual engagement and benefit here is also present in McKay's depiction of a community of vagabonds which endorses the idea of counter-hegemonic cultural evolution.

[23] *Banjo* is subtitled "*A Story Without a Plot."*

The erasure of the reductive binary of the 'local' and the 'global' reduces the isolation of the diaspora; the inclusivist community which arises in what Bhabha might call the 'interstices' of hegemony in *Banjo* is supported indirectly by Grewal and Kaplan's conception of boundaries as transgressive and 'anti-boundary': "What is lost in an uncritical acceptance of this binary division is precisely the fact that the parameters of the local and the global are often indefinable or indistinct—they are permeable constructs" (iii).[24] Such permeability is endorsed by McKay's choice of the port setting as his transnational collective drifts in and out of the unstable locus, refusing to define themselves in relation to an abiding local identity, and renouncing all global and hegemonic affiliations, thus freeing themselves to embrace the transnational alliance available to the migrant in Marseilles. That very freedom is paramount in McKay's depiction of the life of the vagabond, and so unbound by the ties of nationalism and patriotism are his men that it becomes apparent that this transnational identity comports with the experience of the migrant of African descent. McKay writes:

> the vagabond lover of life finds individuals and things to love in many places and not in any one nation . . . A patriot loves not his nation, but the spiritual meannesses of his life of which he has created a frontier wall to hide the beauty of other horizons. (144)

Susan Stanford Friedman has explored this notion of fertile borderlands:

[24] Although the feminist context in which they are writing explicitly of boundaries and the female in works such as Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* may appear at a remove from this consideration of McKay, their central theses can be applied to this reading of *Banjo*.

> At times individuals or groups erect barriers separating themselves from others in a defense of their own difference. . . . At other times, however, the borders between individuals or groups are not so fixed and function rather as a permeable borderland of cultural traffic where differences mingle, blend, and form new ways of being based on imitation and adaptation of the other. Such a borderland has the potential to be the site of connection and reconciliation, however ephemeral. (*Mappings* 155-6)

McKay depicts just such a mode of group identification, one which avoids the aggressive hegemony of patriotism, and in his cultivation of what Edwards calls "vagabond internationalism," McKay re-imagines the possibilities of transnational communion (220). McKay illustrates what Pease proposes:

> The time bound and enclosed nation-state whose institutional form once foreclosed other possibilities has given way to more complex patterns of interdependence grounded in the belief that the local and international are inextricably intertwined. ("National Narratives, Postnational Narration" 2)

In the 'intertwined' and 'interdependent' port space of Marseilles, which so appropriately embodies and combines the local and international paradigm in its transience, McKay's vagabonds and panhandlers navigate an identity which comports with a Black Atlantic construct of movement, encounter and evolution. Gilroy's suggestion that "cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" speaks only

indirectly to McKay (15). Yet McKay offers the reader a vivid version of Gilroy's theory, as he brings to life the 'Atlantic' community of seafarers in the fluid port location, one which also recognises McKay's Caribbean discomfort with the connotations of the sea and slave memory so indelibly marked in his inherited narrative (15). The usefulness of the microcosm is extrapolated by Laura Doyle, and McKay's vision of this representative transnational community of migrants in Marseilles thus becomes imbued with a significance which extends far beyond that French corner of the Atlantic world. Doyle asserts that a

> concentrated focus on regional transnational networks of culture and economy allows us to specify the mediating work of expressive forms within a particular region (producing what Yuri Lotman calls semiospheres), which in turn can shed light on the larger dialectical interaction of local or regional culture, and global or 'external' economy. ("Towards a Philosophy of Transnationalism" 4)

McKay's percipient exploration of theories of transnationalism further underlines his position as an early advocate of transcendent identities. *Banjo* functions even more effectively than *Home to Harlem* as a manifesto for the reconfiguration of minority and ethnic identity beyond the limits ascribed by hegemony. Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone" is another construct through which we may conceptualise McKay's Marseilles. As she suggests, the marginal 'contact zone' is the

> space of colonial encounters, the space in which people's geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. (5)

The instability inherent in Pratt's figuring of contact zones can translate to the port context in *Banjo,* as McKay accentuates the element of encounter and tensions central to the life of the diasporan seafarer. However, counterpointing positive theoretical figurations of 'contact zones' or encounter spaces, we should recognise, too, the subversive potential of the marginal space or borderland. Gloria Anzaldúa constructs a vision of liminality which engages with notions of counter-hegemonic discontent and alterity, and which, although geographically removed from McKay's Marseilles, is wholly pertinent to his literary rendering of the port:

> A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal.' (25)

This chapter will explore the significance of McKay's liminal port setting in *Banjo,* and consider the ways in which a quality of marginality endorses McKay's faith in transnational identities, while registering his sensitivity to an African heritage. Writing from his own lived experience of Marseilles in the 1920s, he recreates the atmosphere of affiliation available to him personally and to the black diaspora in *Banjo*:

> It was a relief to get to Marseilles, to live in among a great gang of black and brown humanity. Negroids from the United States, the West Indies, North Africa and West Africa, all herded together in a warm group. (McKay, *ALWFH* 277)

In the complex interaction between McKay's fiction and the paradigm of the 'Black Atlantic,' the possibility arises of extending that paradigm to accommodate the experiences of African Caribbean vagabondage. The port space combines the qualities of the sea and the land, and reduces the associated reminders of enforced transatlantic passage which are so unavoidably embedded in Gilroy's reimagining of the Atlantic. Following on from this, an analysis of the seafaring community of men in *Banjo* focuses on the distinctly homoeroticised nature of affiliation in Marseilles. McKay's creation of a distinctly subaltern black seafaring community re-imagines and subverts the Anglo-Saxon construction of 'transcendental homelessness' proposed by Lukács as the quintessential condition of the white modernist writer, a condition with which the Jamaican McKay personally identified. McKay transcends canonical limitations and so subverts the associated 'whiteness' of traditional modernist paradigms:

> In D.H. Lawrence I found confusion—all of the ferment and torment and turmoil, the hesitation and hate and alarm, the sexual inquietude and the incertitude of this age, and the psychic and romantic groping for a way out. (*ALWFH* 247)

Regardless of ethnicity or race, McKay empathises with the global uncertainties of the displaced in the wake of World War One. Caryl Phillips, in his introduction to *Banjo,* identifies McKay's comprehension of the feelings of fissure which accompany migration: "McKay is a writer who understands that for a great number of twentieth century people 'imaginary homelands' are often more important than the places they presently inhabit" (xvi). Lukács' assertion that "the form of the novel is, like no other one, an expression of transcendental homelessness" is problematised in the plot-less narrative 'structure' of *Banjo* which also operates on a meta level, as

McKay's subversion of the form facilitates his performance of black modernist exile, subversively appropriating the distinctly white modernist experience described by Lukács (qtd. in Neubauer 263).[25] McKay's delineation of the maritime community of men challenges the received norms of modernism, while also accommodating a transcendent, diasporic, and decidedly transnational atmosphere in the liminal space.

An engagement with the unique version of Pan-Africanism proposed in *Banjo* discloses McKay's endorsement of the benefits of African ideological reunification, while renouncing the more radical aims of such movements as Garvey's 'Back to Africa.' The particular version of Pan-Africanism expressed in *Banjo* again indicates McKay's personal and political isolation from mainstream 1920s black propaganda, as his ideals rest awkwardly with the dominant Pan-African perspectives of groups such as the N.A.A.C.P. and the U.N.I.A. His beliefs reflect his reluctance to accept African American group identity, a feature also reflected in his chosen locus for the novel, Marseilles, the "mythical . . . gateway to Africa" (Fabre 109-10). McKay's *Banjo* is a landmark in the evolution of black political discourse, situated as it is as a

[25] Connected to this consideration of the plot-less structure is the role of the picaresque narrative. As Bjornson explains: "The best picaresque novels are not, as has often been claimed, patchwork collections of randomly selected episodes. Although they characteristically employ materials from diverse sources, these materials are subordinated to a narrator's unifying perspective which focuses upon a recurrent human situation and often reconciles the traditional opposition between the comic and the serious" (7-8). McKay, I suggest, presents a complicated imbrication of the type of episodic narrative and the novel of unifying experience described by Bjornson. The obvious presence of a depiction of the 'recurrent human situation' of diaspora, exile and marginality in McKay's fiction co-exists with the illustration of various experiences and encounters of the motley collectives of his novels.

contemporaneous literary product to 1920s Pan-Africanism and as a precursor to and significant influence on the Négritude movement.

The final 'location' in which *Banjo* exerts its unique vision of the transnational nature of black ideological engagement is thus the Négritude movement, which although often ascribed to a French origin is in reality a product of intercultural exchange and cross-cultural encounter, and traceable to Caribbean, West African, American and French loci. In this light, *Banjo* becomes a representative text for Négritude, as McKay unfalteringly delivers his version of black transnational, exilic and counter-hegemonic community in the vein of this commentary from Glissant: "The thrust of negritude among Caribbean intellectuals was a response perhaps to the need, by relating to a common origin, to rediscover unity (equilibrium) beyond dispersion" (5).

The trope of the "ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean" chosen by Gilroy to represent the "circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts" in a re-imagined middle passage resonates with *Banjo's* port setting of Marseilles (4). McKay's reluctance to fully engage with the memory of slavery is palpable, as he situates the seafarers in the port. His anticipation of Gilroy's theory is all the more striking for the negative connotations attendant on middle passage re-imaginings. An early sensitivity to later postcolonial celebrations of hybridity and encounter is contained in McKay's careful locating of the group of men in the port, and as Christopher L. Miller emphasises: "as a subject of inquiry the slave trade cannot help but cast a horrific, negative light on the vogue in postcolonial studies for the celebration of encounter, movement, and hybridity" (ix). McKay's novel contains an awareness of the historically negative aspects of hybridity, even as he distracts from

this horror by creating in the port a distinct and recognisable black diasporic community, based again on his own time in Marseilles, and functioning as a rewriting of Black Atlantic narratives: "It was good to feel the strength and distinction of a group and the assurance of belonging to it" (*ALWFH* 277). McKay dissents from the assertions of Atlantic rejuvenation made subsequently by Gilroy, in that he consciously renovates a disparate assembly in Marseilles, on the land. He intimates a desire to create in the port a transnational and free collective, released from the bonds of the sea and its traumatic black history. What Gilroy describes as a "living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion" is transposed onto the port setting in *Banjo* (4). McKay embraced, decades earlier than Gilroy, the notion of routed and rooted interconnectivity.

The silences and loss of memory experienced in the middle passage and retrospectively in the literature of the black diaspora are subverted by Gilroy himself, of course, in his figuring of the sea space as a place for encounter and interculturalism. As he revitalises the silenced voice of the black past, he furnishes the diaspora with a voice which it was historically and politically denied. Narratives such as the contested *Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano* and the many other slave narratives which depict a black seafaring enslaved collective traversing the Atlantic, indicates the deficit in black histories of the Atlantic experience from the viewpoint of chosen black vagabondage.[26] In the realm of contemporary visual art,

[26] Contested, because there are serious doubts about Equiano's birthplace, with critics such as Vincent Carretta suggesting that Equiano was actually born in America, and that his narrative of an African childhood, pre-capture and slavery, is merely "a projection" (Jenkins, *The Language of Caribbean Poetry* 187-8). Even so, the significance of recreating from memory, be it actual or inherited, the place the author perceives of as 'home' resonates with McKay's last work of fiction, *Banana Bottom*.

Alan Rice suggests that Lubaina Himid and Tom Feelings reposition and represent the African in transatlantic memory in roles of agency: "Both Himid and Feelings rework the Anglo-American depiction of the Atlantic, infusing it with meaning for Africans in the diaspora. They take the stock images and remould them so that they have redolence for their communities" (*Radical Narratives* 80). Himid locates figures who were forced to the peripheries through slavery to a central place in her art, thus "centralizing their role, in contradistinction to their traditional marginalisation" enacted on slave ships in the middle passage (Rice, *Radical Narratives* 77). Walvin recognises the negative depictions of the middle passage which conceal the real terrors: "The romance of the Atlantic ventures (in reality it was a brutal, sordid and violent world) was actively promoted by a number of early seventeenth-century authors and publishers, most memorably by the compilations of Richard Hakluyt" and yet McKay's deviation from the type of narrative which overwhelmed the depiction of 'Atlantic' writings suggests a desire to create a mindful and reconstructed Black Atlantic narrative (20). William L. Andrews suggests that from the experience of marginality of the African American in the 1850s in America emerged a literature which attempted to reflect and embody those sentiments of liminality, and thus the black autobiography came to prominence as an expression of a people's unsettled status: "To signify and interpret the shadowy borders of other-consciousness became increasingly the central concern of black autobiography in the crisis years leading to the Civil War" (169). McKay draws from this autobiographical literary tradition, and in his explication of the 'shadowy borders of other-consciousness' of the diaspora in Marseilles, he develops an

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McKay performs a similar version of 'projection' as his semi-autobiographic novel imbricates the Jamaica of his childhood with the imaginings of his homeland from exile.

ambiguously hybrid locus beyond the limits of reductive binaries. As author and fictionalised character, he is the "interstitial figure" who

> creates his fluid status and unlikely freedom. On the boundaries of behaviours . . . such figures mediate and often reverse the binary oppositions that define differences between the hierarchical states to which they are marginal. (Andrews 178)

Adapting the idea of the boundary as proposed by Heidegger, Andrews employs the idea in an alternative context to that which is discussed here, as he locates the author, and not the characters or the setting, as the marginal figure, but one who, in his liminal position, is endowed with an objective lens through which to explore the ideological and actual life of African Americans on the periphery of society. Andrews integrates the idea of the boundary into the literary tradition itself, and his locating of the black canon of mid-nineteenth-century autobiographers on the margins of culture is also reflected internally in McKay's narrative. His marginalised vagabonds view the world from an objective and detached stance, but nonetheless forge a place for themselves in the narrative of 1920s French and Atlantic life, as does McKay, himself a liminal character in the context of 1920s American and French culture. Social and sexual marginality are then addressed by McKay, and his narrative functions to locate a specifically black modernism of Caribbean and bisexual character in a valid and contestatory space, much as H.D. did with her complex and gendered poetry and prose, which, like McKay's, was threatened by masculinist, heterosexual literary modernism:

> H.D.'s prose . . . played a special and complex role in the (en)gendering of modernism. It provided the verbal space in which

> she could weave the voice and vision of a woman in the modern world. (Stanford Freidman, *Penelope's Web* 7)

Both writers challenge an imposed silence in the use of their fictions to create a 'verbal space' but also an ideological 'space' for the realisation of female and transgressive sexual identity which is marginalised by mainstream authority.

From the outset of *Banjo* McKay situates Marseilles as a liminal space that can be read in the context of contemporary conceptions of the Black Atlantic: "Heaving along from side to side, like a sailor on the unsteady deck of a ship, Lincoln Agrippa Daily, familiarly known as Banjo, patrolled the magnificent length of the great breakwater of Marseilles, a banjo in his hand" (3).[27] What McKay suggests here is analogous to Foucault's notion of the ship as "a place without a place," thus epitomising the figurative function of the port in the novel as comparable with the abstract construct of Foucault's theory of heterotopias (27). The archetypal picaro[28]

[27] Emphasising the gendered reading of the port-side, Stephens points to the indications given in this quotation to the centrality of the male figure: "the masculine identities of the men in Banjo's crew are still shaped and defined in the maritime world on whose periphery they seem to wander" (*Black Empire* 179). While certainly true, I suggest that the conceptualisation of the port as sea-space or allegorical ship is more pertinent to the reading of *Banjo* as a re-imagined Black Atlantic narrative, and that the gendered reading points not just to a homosocial context, but to the colonial context, as I will discuss later, employing the theory of Christopher L. Miller.

[28] Bjornson suggests that the story of the picaro "essentially involves a rootless, unattached individual who must secure his own survival and psychological well-being in a society which openly espouses traditional ideals while actually sanctioning dehumanizing modes of behaviour. Characterized by an ambiguous or non-existent link with his father, this outsider (or 'half-outsider') inherits no place which can be considered a home, no trade by means of which he can sustain himself, and no social

accompanied by signifiers of an African American musical inheritance, Banjo conceives of the port as a ship, situating McKay's narrative in an allegorical space and so connecting it to Gilroy's notion of ships as "shifting spaces in between the fixed spaces they connect" (16). Yet McKay celebrates this instability as it presents for Banjo moments of unexpected and random encounter of the kind exemplified in Fabre's use of the mythology of the 'gateway,' a construct to which I will return. Typifying the serendipitous nature of life in Marseilles, McKay's vagabonds meet each other for the first time in a moment which references not only their seafaring experiences but also their irreverent attitude to commodities and materialism:

> out of the bottom of one of the many freight cars along the quay he saw black bodies dropping. Banjo knew box cars. He had hoboed in America. But never had he come across a box car with a hole in the bottom. (3-4)

Subverting the intended use of the box cars, the men use global capitalism as a medium for encounter, rather than participating in the cycle of materialism represented by freighters and box cars. The 'black bodies' are those of West Indian Malty Avis, "the English-speaking Negro" Ginger, the Senegalese Dengel, and the "small, wiry, dull-black boy" Bugsy; these men, along with the Ray of *Home to Harlem*, unconsciously form a transnational collective, for whom blackness is both a signifier of similarity and a reason for solidarity (4). Yet McKay rejects blackness as the sole emblem of unity in Marseilles, and his emphasis is on the affiliation of the

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position to provide him with well-defined relationships to other people" (6). It is with this in mind that I call Banjo, the 'archetypal picaro.'

displaced, who embrace their social liminality for its freedoms and the opportunity it provides for transnationalism:

> They were all on the beach, and there were many others besides them—white men, brown men, black men. Finns, Poles, Italians, Slavs, Maltese, Indians, Negroids, African Negroes, West Indian Negroes . . . all dumped down in the great Provençal port, bumming a day's work, a meal, a drink, existing from hand to mouth, anyhow anyway, between box car, tramp ship, bistro, and bordel. (6)

McKay's citation of the diverse nationalities found in Marseilles indicates the wealth and heterogeneity of cultures in the port, and from this emerges an antidote to the bigoted patriotism reviled by both McKay and his fictionalised self, Ray:

> The sentiment of patriotism was not one of Ray's possessions, perhaps because he was a child of deracinated ancestry. . . . It seemed a most unnatural thing to him for a man to love a nation—a swarming hive of human beings bartering, competing, exploiting, lying, cheating, battling, suppressing, and killing among themselves; possessing too, the faculty to organize their villainous rivalries into a monstrous system for plundering weaker peoples. (144)

The explicit imbrication of nationalism and violence speaks to McKay's need to envisage an alternate mode of group identification which transcends the limits of hegemony, and which is appropriate to the experience of diaspora. In Marseilles the men can 'become' and perform certain identities, and as Grewal suggests in the context of female marginalised narratives, there is the opportunity for McKay in his positioning of the vagabonds in an unfamiliar society, to "confront and fracture the

self-other opposition in the name of inclusions, multiple identities, and diasporic subject positions" ("Autobiographic Subjects" 234). Banjo, Ray and the motley vagabonds find a place in Marseilles' atmosphere of relative inclusivity, and Ray is profoundly affected by the masculine collective and their bonding:

> It was no superior condescension, no feeling of race solidarity or Back to Africa demonstration . . . that made Ray love the atmosphere of the common black drifters. He loved it with the poetical enthusiasm of the vagabond black that he himself was. (209)

Marseilles figures equally as a haven and a hovel, and in its role as a seafarer's dream-space, it provides temporary solace from the hardships of life at sea, a life which is haunted with a particular cruelty for the black sailor: "All through his seafaring days, Banjo dreamed dreams of the seaman's port" (11). Marseilles is possessed, at least philosophically, by the vagabond and the very nature of this multicultural ownership endows it with transnational qualities and potential. Marseilles belongs to the diaspora, and sustains the sailor: "It was the port that seamen talked about—the marvelous, dangerous, attractive, big wide open port" (13). As with Jake and Harlem, McKay depicts the atmosphere of inconstancy as in sympathy with the restlessness of the vagabond, and this 'shifting' port space complements the alterity and routed personae of the men: "It was as if all the derelicts of all the seas had drifted up here to sprawl out the days in the sun" (19). In the beachfront setting McKay illustrates the symbiosis of atmosphere and desire: "Every chord in him responded to the loose, bistro love-life of the Ditch" (11). The 'looseness' of all boundaries and limits in Marseilles accommodates the seafaring community, and allows a transnational alliance to evolve, which in turn indicates the merits of extending the parameters of identity to encompass a transnational

component, sensitive to origin, encounter, sexuality and experience and epitomised by Banjo's approach to life in the port: "Easy come, easy go. Tha's the living way" (30).

Presiding over the dreams of the men, the transnational facade of Marseilles lends itself to escapism, sensuality and cultural exchange: "Senegalese, Sudanese, Somalese, Nigerians, West Indians, Americans, blacks from everywhere, crowded together, talking strange dialects, but brought together, understanding one another by the language of wine" (38). Replicating the thematic trend of *Home to Harlem,* McKay candidly portrays the unseemly side of life in Marseilles, its poverty, violence and vice. Marseilles' political liminality contributes to its social degeneration and personal degradation. Life is distinctly 'reusable' in Marseilles, a place where "fish and vegetables and girls and youthful touts, cats, mongrels, and a thousand second-hand things were all mingled together in a churning agglomeration of stench and sliminess" (13). This disturbs Banjo's delight in the place, and the decrepit architecture and its prostitutions of love and labour lend to the port an undercurrent of malignancy, not unlike McKay's dual portrait of Harlem: "gray damp houses bunched together . . . mongrel-faced guides . . . old hags at the portals, like skeletons presiding over an orgy with skeleton smile and skeleton charm" (14). The deathly 'charm' of Marseilles' seedy side streets troubles the aspiration for community, and yet, significantly, Banjo is as intoxicated by the underworld of Marseilles as is Jake by Harlem's multifarious personae: "His wonderful Marseilles!" (13). There is a palpable sense that though murky and at times dilapidated, Marseilles and its inhabitants are content in their repudiation of materialism and avarice: "The quarter of the old port exuded a nauseating odor of mass life congested, confused, moving round and round in a miserable suffocating

circle. Yet everything there seemed to belong and fit naturally in place" (19). Marseilles is host to an eclectic society, and notably, one which in its fluid and inconstant standards permits 'everything', and all the associated connotations of 'mass life.'

Paramount to the understanding of the social order of Marseilles is the recognition that it is in spite of the grim aspect of the port and its propensity for vice that the transnational community forge bonds. This vagabond society embraces the character of Marseilles for its subaltern tendencies. They prove the strength of the transnational alliance by surviving, regardless of the poverty and dearth of material comforts. The communal spirit fortifies the vagabond:

> Though the Ditch was dirty and stinking he had preferred it to a better proletarian quarter because of the surprising and warm contacts with the men of his own race . . . Their presence had brought a keen zest to the Ditch that made it in a way beautiful. (243)

McKay explicitly defines 'their presence' in the port and their cultural exchange as the quality which brings to the port its value, and it is his identification of community with the people, and not necessarily in the place, which endows the vagabonds with a worthy identity, beyond any ascribed by nationality or borders. The port side liminality encourages the flexible social interactions of the men, and in their random and sporadic unions, McKay envisages a possible re-definition of communal identification: "There was a barbarous international romance in the ways of Marseilles that was vividly significant of the great modern movement of life" (70). He envisages a society which is capable of focusing on cultural exchange, rather than capitalist profit, and in this way McKay again reflects the notion of

intercultural evolution expounded in Gilroy's Black Atlantic construct. Where Gilroy extrapolates that the "circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs" is a positive result of enforced transatlantic passage, McKay situates this 'circulation' in the port setting, as he reduces the emphasis on the ship and the sea by bringing Gilroy's construct ashore (4).

Yet as Gilroy re-imagines the middle passage as possessing the potential for cross-cultural fertility in its enforced encounters, McKay endows this seafaring narrative with a particularly diasporic resonance, by recognising African transatlantic heritage, while the situating of the intercultural connections in Marseilles reduces the negative associations of middle passage trauma and memory. McKay's discomfort with a seafaring, ship-based narrative interrupts Gilroy's positive re-imagining of the Black Atlantic. In *Banjo*, Ray voices perhaps the central quandary of the Caribbean native's relationship to the sea:

> Ray loved the life of the docks more than the life of the sea. He had never learned to love the deep sea. Out there on a boat he always felt like a reluctant prisoner cast out upon a menacing dreariness of deep water. He had never known a seaman who really loved the sea. (70)[29]

[29] Stephens suggests that "seafaring as a male space can still also be a foundational site for the creation of alternative masculine forms of diasporic black community"; while this theory accommodates *Banjo,* it also must be emphasised just how significant it is that McKay's narrative privileges not the seafaring, but the port-side interaction (*Black Empire* 180). Certainly seafaring facilitates the male encounter, but the ramifications of his focus on the port indicate a distinct discomfort with the sea.

The allusion to this heritage of slavery endorses McKay's choice of Marseilles; he does not deny the history of African enslavement, and he is actively aware of the processes of displacement, but he consciously depicts the panhandling men as outside the control of capitalist avarice while in the port, in a bid to shield them from the memory of "black men under the equatorial sun . . . carrying loads steadied and unsupported on kink-thick heads hardened and trained to bear their burdens" (70). In the port is the security denied by the middle passage, and although McKay is aware of the ancestral 'burden' which certainly didn't end at the port, he nonetheless indicates the importance of the land to the diaspora, as it acts as a point of unity and momentary cohesion: "the Vieux Port had offered him a haven in its frowsy, thickly-peopled heart where he could exist en pension proletarian" where

> every country of the world where Negroes live had sent representatives drifting into Marseilles. A great vagabond host of jungle-like Negroes trying to scrape a temporary existence from the macadamized surface of this great Provençal port. (69-70)

The disparity between the 'jungle' and the 'macadamized surface' acknowledges the horrendous change in locus for the kidnapped slave from the African rural site to the urbanising Americas, and yet McKay provides a possibility of escape, as he specifically defines the nature of existence in Marseilles as 'temporary.' The diaspora deforms the enforced movement of its inherited history, and movement becomes something to be explored and determined by the African diaspora. McKay's figuring of transnationalism replicates the deformation of mastery performed in his thematically radical but structurally conservative poetry.

Although McKay is not among his exemplars of a Black Atlantic aesthetic, Gilroy's theory may productively be read in conjunction with McKay's fiction, since both engage with concepts of the transnational. Gilroy chooses the icon of the ship to represent Pan-African and diasporic encounter to focus the critic on the "various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland," and yet *Banjo* denies such redemption (4). There is a sense of dislocation derived from the vagabonds' and seafarers' global migrations, but the idea of an 'African homeland' is perhaps sentimentalised and certainly runs counter to the actual aims of the men in *Banjo.* As Edwards points out, the songs and other cultural products exchanged by the men in Marseilles represent an "exilic desire for a home that is ever-receding, ever-elusive, always slightly beyond the reach and capacities of the speaker" (221). "Home," writes Fred D'Aguiar, "is always elsewhere" (qtd. in Rice, *Radical Narratives* 2). Marseilles' figurative role as 'ship' or site for diasporic reunification fails to facilitate any redemptive return to Africa, and explicit in *Banjo* is the need to create a community which transgresses the boundaries of nationality, be these geographic, political or even ideological. The vagabonds demonstrate an explicit need to unify, and their transnational diasporic affiliation is epitomised in their sharing of the songs and rhythms of their various ancestors. They bear witness to McKay's transnationalism, and their expression of ethnicity through the medium of music illustrates the pertinence of and pre-emptive subversion by McKay of Linebaugh's theory that "the ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record" (119). McKay fuses the histories of 'the ship' and the 'long-playing record' to highlight the importance of the random encounter brought about by vagabondage which cultivates intercultural collaboration in the port, as seen in Glissant's suggestion that

> Diversity, which is neither chaos nor sterility, means the human spirit's striving for a cross-cultural relationship, without universalist transcendence. Diversity needs the presence of peoples, no longer as objects to be swallowed up, but with the intention of creating a new relationship. (98)

Reflecting and emphasising the transnational nature of the multicultural collective in Marseilles is the musical heritage they exchange, as each tune played is a variant of an original African melody altered by migration and intercultural encounter: "They played the 'beguin,' which was just a Martinique variant of the 'jelly-roll' or the Jamaican 'burru' or the Senegalese 'bombe'" (110). Their music transcends the limiting geographies of rigid nationalisms, and although the songs are inflected with their African ancestry, the men are liberated to adopt the cultural signifiers of the various loci through which they travel. In doing so they contribute to the evolution of a distinctly transnational culture, valuable particularly because of its diversity and its recognition of its African heritage: "Negroes are never so beautiful and magical as when they do that gorgeous sublimation of the primitive African sex feeling" (110-11). Language barriers, too, are irrelevant to the men, as their encounters are based on ideological and cultural engagement. The 'dynamism' inherent in their experience of bond formation is both liberal and transgressive in its homosocial[30] normativity, as the men exchange music and dance in a male dominated sphere:

[30] Considering *Banjo* as a homosocial and homoerotic novel owes meaning in part to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's understanding of the genre. As part of her delineation of homosocial contexts of the mid-18th-19th century English novel, Sedgwick locates various forms of male bonding on an ideological continuum marked by homosocial activities such as "male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality" (1-2). Her inclusion but not prioritisation of "desire" and the

> A coffee-black boy from Cameroon and a chocolate brown from Dakar stand up to each other to dance a native sex-symbol dance. Bending knee and nodding head, they dance up to each other. As they almost touch, the smaller boy spins away suddenly round and dances away. Oh, exquisite movement! (52)

There is a recognition of a shared male heritage which is now diversified, and which paradoxically encourages their affinity. As George Lamming suggests of the migrant West Indian in London in the 1950s: "no islander from the West Indies sees himself as a West Indian until he encounters another islander in foreign territory" (*The Pleasures of Exile* 214). It is the meeting abroad which affirms common identity.

McKay depicts Marseilles as a place that nurtures male collective bonding: "No other setting could be more appropriate for the men on the beach" (19). These men actively avoid forging lasting relationships with women, and their homosocial behaviour is a combination of chauvinism, and laziness: "Banjo had taken Latnah as she came, easily. It seemed the natural thing to him to fall on his feet, that Latnah should take the place of the other girl to help him now that he needed help" (29). The vagabonds' efforts at intimacy are focused on the creation and cultivation of male bonds, and their selective isolation from women is specifically and explicitly

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"potentially erotic" along this spectrum is apposite to McKay's rendering of the male interactions in Marseilles (1). The usefulness of such a continuum to this reading of McKay's fiction is proposed, indirectly, by Sedgwick herself, as she suggests that her hypothesis of an 'unbroken' continuum is "a strategy for making generalizations about, and marking historical differences in, the structure of men's relations with other men" (2). The lack of necessity to divide the homosocial/erotic/sexual into limited categories at the core of Sedgwick's theory endorses further the fluidity of concepts of sexuality in *Banjo*, which is relevant also when considering McKay's personal approach to sexuality.

vocalised in terms of their preference for male energies: "The Senegalese boys crowd the floor, dancing with one another. They dance better male with male or individually, than with the girls, putting more power in their feet, dancing more wildly, more natively, more savagely" (51). As Stephens suggests:

> A queer reading of McKay's second novel allows us to gender the more affective dimensions of constructing belonging in a black international community. The story of black male transnationality *Banjo* provides is very much a gendered story of the formation of alternative male desires. (*Black Empire* 169)

The absence of women permits the aggressively sexual tensions of their interactions, and the points of unification underlined by McKay are masculinity and 'native' inclinations. This is a strictly homocentric sphere, and as the men reject patriarchal roles of father, husband or even provider, woman emerges in a secondary role, to be dispensed with and picked up whenever the masculine bond is weakened. The liminal port space, like Harlem, engenders an alternative reading of gender role stereotypes.[31]

This subversion of familial structures is a recurring feature of McKay's writing, and yet when viewed in the light of Christopher L. Miller's reworking of the Oedipus complex, McKay's failure to create a fully realised 'family' unit may be revisited. Miller creates a nexus between the slave trade and the Oedipus complex,

[31] Stephens proposes that "Banjo and his crew perform a free and unspirited expression of black masculinity. . .made possible by Marseille's liminality as a border space between land and sea, as a seaport connecting the imperial metropole to the colonies," which draws attention to the specific imbrication of the homo-social context and the colonial context (*Black Empire* 185). This can be understood even more clearly through the lens of Miller's Oedipal analysis.

proposing that the accepted 'triangular' shape of the slave trade is symbolic of power and

> of the direct contestation of power. . . . It suggests a logic of ineluctable, 'eternal' relationships: father, mother, offspring—terms that in the cultural logic of colonialism translate into Europe, Africa, and the New World. (5)

McKay's persistent literary complication of the family unit reverberates in the context of Miller's thesis, as we consider the implications of his Jamaican origins in that paradigm. For the colonial subject, the position of 'child' is one against which he rebels, against the European 'father' and African 'mother' and, as in any rebellion, this involves both a rejection of authority and a subversion of hegemony. McKay actively subverts this family unit in a bid to disrupt this discomforting Oedipal control of Caribbean 'offspring,' and the lack of both paternal and maternal figures in McKay's urban fictions suggests, perhaps, an (albeit unconscious) colonial subject's response to an inherited, cultural Oedipal complex. McKay's personal migration from the Caribbean to the United States, to Europe, to Russia, and to North Africa suggests a reluctance to accept Aimé Césaire's depiction of the West Indian as "the bastard of Europe, torn between this father who denies him and this mother he denies" (qtd. in Miller 5). McKay's deformation of the family unit in *Banjo* provides a space in which his vagabonds can spurn heterosexual intimacy in favour of the position as 'sweet-men' who can be financially subsidised by women, but emotionally sustained by men who share the inherited complexes of African displacement: "The Africans gave him a positive feeling of wholesome contact with racial roots. They made him feel that he was not merely an unfortunate accident of birth, but that he belonged to a race weighted and tested, and poised in the universal

scheme" (330). McKay explicitly identifies African collective male affiliation as that which repairs Ray's damaged Haitian identity, extoling a specifically and ideologically male version of exile and migration. This is an intrinsic component of the narrative, and one which affords McKay the opportunity to synthesis his complex sexuality and his struggles with his ethnicity through the fictional surrogate, Ray.

Yet the exclusion of women as fully realised characters who engage on an equal level with the men in the port demands consideration, and the gendering of the experience of exile as masculine is not uniquely a feature of McKay's writing; Penelopean fidelity and stasis is inscribed on Western literary traditions. James Clifford suggests that diasporic experiences tend generally to be masculinist in perspective. He proposes:

> When diasporic experience is viewed in terms of displacement rather than placement, travelling rather than dwelling, and disarticulation rather than rearticulation, then the experiences of men will tend to predominate. Specific diaspora histories, co-territories, community practices, dominations, and contact relations may then be generalized into gendered postmodern globalisms, abstract nomadologies. (258-9)

McKay's version of transnational diasporic unification in Marseilles indeed privileges the masculine experience, and can be understood also to reflect the corollary between the homosexual undercurrent in *Banjo* and the absence of developed female characters. Stephens asserts that there is an inability in *Banjo* "to see women as agents in transforming this narrative" as "McKay's male protagonists choose to move on without them, as if the only way to reimagine a more worldly black masculinity is as detached from their own investment in women as the site for home" (*Black Empire* 168). The nexus of the abandonment of women and male

international mobility underlined here emphasises the problematic nature of heterosocial gender relations in the port space, and McKay endorses the flight of men from any responsibility to a relationship by positing women, in this instance Banjo's lover Latnah, as supportive of his unreliability: "She was oriental and her mind was not alien to the idea of man's insistence on freedom of desire for himself. Perhaps she liked Banjo more because he was vagabond" (64). His allure is defined in terms of his peripatetic, wandering inclinations, and Latnah's understanding of his lifestyle is her only means of coping when he inevitably deserts her. His emotional detachment from the domestic sphere, which she manages and provides, allows him to socialise with the other vagabonds and panhandlers.

Yet the financial dependence on women suggests more than a manipulative chauvinism. The lifestyle of McKay's unemployed community of men who reject capitalism, but at the same time are reviled by the working class, is indicative of a culturally inherited burden of the complexities and degenerative power of long-term unemployment. Their apparently carefree lives are profoundly offensive to those who participate in capitalism and remunerative seafaring: "You think if you-all lay down sweet and lazy in you' skin while we others am wrastling with salt water, wese gwine to fatten you moh in you' laziness? G'way from this heah white man's broad nigger bums" (30). Viewed by the workers of the docks as inexcusably parasitic, the men's lives of lethargy are tainted by these accusations. Yet, when viewed in the historical context of the emergent Atlantic proletariat delineated by Linebaugh and Rediker, vagabond unemployment becomes endowed with significance beyond material ideologies. Through practices of expulsion and enclosure in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, imperial Britain stole land from the subsisting rural class, driving them to cities where their lack of urban-relevant skills led inevitably to

unemployment, crime and the creation by the upper classes of a demon 'other' class who were "subject to the merciless cruelty of a labor and criminal code as severe and terrifying as any that had yet appeared in modern history" (Linebaugh and Rediker 20). These displaced vagrants became symbols of social disorder who, through no fault of their own, were now dependent on society for survival, viewed as a threat to upper class life, and so were forced into geopolitically marginal zones: Vagabonds were "a hydra-headed monster poised to destroy the state and social order" (Linebaugh and Rediker 18). As an ideologically created demonic group, the financially impecunious British, Irish and Scottish were banished from the British Isles, in a bid to 'clean up' society and rid them of the ugly monster of poverty. Thus a transatlantic route for the unemployed and undesirable was put in place—a by-product of which was, inevitably, an identification of the British, Irish and Scottish exile with the African exile, both on their way to the colonies to work on the plantations (Linebaugh and Rediker 19-20). In their mutual experience of enforced transatlantic traversing and displacement a profound connectivity emerged. This anti-imperial and anti-capitalist alliance was created, ironically, by an avaricious imperialism:

> Thus falling within the statutory meaning of 'sturdy rogue and beggar' were all those outside of organized wage labour, as well as those whose activities comprised the culture, tradition and autonomous self-understanding of this volatile, questioning and unsteady proletariat. (Linebaugh and Rediker 20)

Yet a key sympathy emerges between the historical delineation of Atlantic unemployment as explicated by Linebaugh and Rediker, and the fictional community depicted in Marseilles by McKay. The implicit interconnectivity of unemployment,

seafaring, and the formation of communities of men who transcend the limits ascribed by capitalism and class consciousness but who are viewed as subversive is elucidated in McKay's novel. He writes of the hostility of authority to their beach-dwelling ways. Ray is brutalised by the police simply for being idle, reflecting authority's general disgust for the vagabonds:

> He was thinking about Banjo and the boys, . . . when passing two policemen in the street leading to his hotel (one leaning against the door of a house and the other standing carelessly on the pavement), he was suddenly grabbed without warning. . . . the bigger policeman stunned him with a blow of his fist on the back of the neck. (274-5)

The undeserved aggression visited upon Ray is suggestive of the deep animosity in the port, represented here by the French police, for the vagabond, which recalls the 'many-headed hydra' construct of marginalised 16th century British society. McKay reflects in his narrative the analysis of the uses of terror as social control proposed by Linebaugh and Rediker in the context of Britain and the Atlantic world of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Ray's experiences epitomise the authoritarian use of fear in a modern context, where "to elaborate a culture of fear was indispensible" as a means of subduing the restless and marginalised (Linebaugh and Rediker 56).

The vagabond nature of the black diaspora in Marseilles is a version of those seafaring communities which evolved precisely because of a history of displacement, and which united the disparate African and European in myriad port side loci. There, as in Marseilles, in the taverns and bars, lies the possibility not only for intercultural affiliation but also for rebellion, and the culturally embedded notion of subversive

Atlantic proletarianism finds a home. It is in the alliance made in the port that the socially liminal reinvent themselves as legitimate, as they

> combined the experiences of the deep-sea ship (hydrarchy), the military regiment, the plantation, the waterfront gang, the religious conventicle, and the ethnic tribe or clan to make something new, unprecedented, and powerful. (Linebaugh and Rediker 179)

The valuable experiences garnered at sea and in diasporic exchanges become directly implicated, in this light, as the essential bind connecting the men. McKay explores this possibility, and his vagabonds become empowered by their liminality, their apparent laziness more of a protest against the global capitalism which is the product of white political authority. Perceived as slothful by the masses—"Instead a gwine along back to work, you lay down on the beach a bumming mens who am trying to make a raspactable living" (30)—Banjo asserts his pride in his transcendence of greed: "I take life easy like you-all, but I ain't gwine to lay myself wide open to any insulting cracker of a white man" (44-5). Existing in a continuum of seafarers, the vagabond community is both historical and also distinctively transnational in its ancestry, as the practices of community performed in Marseilles echo and re-perform those of the African and British migrants of the 16th century. This liminal transnationalism then provides a remedy to the exclusivist nationalism so notoriously celebrated by the French. As Clifford proposes:

> Experiences of loss, marginality, and exile (differentially cushioned by class) are often reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked by advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism,

> and stubborn visions of renewal. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension. (257)

The pertinence of the male (homoerotic) bond highlighted by McKay subverts the predominantly heterosexual tradition of seafaring.[32] McKay unites his men in the port, aware of the potential there for the generation of homoerotic bonds based on their shared experiences of wandering: "Ginger and Bugsy stood up to each other and performed a strenuous movement of the 'Black Bottom,' as they had learned it from Negro seamen of the American Export Line" (8). The seafarers spurn heterosexual relationships because the very essence of their alliance is inextricably bound to its male bonding and its routedness, epitomised in microcosm by the orchestra Banjo organises which is defined as both communal and homoerotic: "Banjo's skin was itching to make some romantic thing . . . And one afternoon he walked straight into a dream—a cargo boat with a crew of four music-making colored boys" (49). It is this discourse on their 'color' and their lives of "vagabond internationalism" which enables McKay to interweave male homoerotic bonding, racial affiliation and patterns of transatlantic traversing to create a more realistic

[32] However, Leslie Fiedler explores the latent homoeroticism of Ishmael and Queequeg's bond on the Pequod in *Moby Dick*, as they appropriate the marriage trope to their own circumstances:

> the Pure marriage of Ishmael and Queequeg is set before us: the initial going to bed together and the first shyness overcome . . . next, the wedding ceremony itself (for in this marriage like so many others the ceremonial follows the deflowering), with the ritual of touching foreheads . . . finally, a symbolic portrayal of the continuing state of marriage through the image of the 'monkey-rope' which binds the lovers fast waist to waist. (48)

Although Fiedler is discussing the racial implications of the homosocial in the context of the American novel, McKay can be seen to engage with the possibilities of the homosocial delineated in the seafaring patterns of Melville's writing.

vision of contemporary Pan-Africanism (Edwards 220). This version presents stronger possibilities for realisation in the modern 1920s New World African diaspora than the weaker and untenable aspirations of Garvey, and the often ambiguous beliefs of Du Bois. As Cooper makes clear, highlighting again McKay's socio-political liminality:

> McKay belonged neither to the middle-class protest tradition of the N.A.A.C.P. nor to the grass-roots black nationalist camp of Garvey's Back to Africa movement. He was ideologically closest to a small but articulate group of black intellectuals, then only just emerging in Harlem, who were convinced that black interests would be best served in the kind of world advocated by international socialism. (*Claude McKay* 105)

The tenets of Du Bois' Pan-Africanism are, arguably, troubled by the promotion of an Africanist idyll, articulated in an elevated rhetoric:

> I believe that the African form in color and curve is the beautifulest thing on earth; the face is not so lovely—though often comely with perfect teeth and shining eyes,—but the form of the slim limbs, the muscled torso, the deep full breasts! (Sundquist 646)

Du Bois celebrates the essential beauty of 'the African,' and the imagery invoked by his language is echoed in the later Négritude movement. It appeals also to McKay's cultivation of an African diaspora in Marseilles whose alliance is premised on a similar seduction by the 'African form in color and curve.' Yet the movement which facilitates the union of the seafarers in *Banjo* is undermined in Du Bois's understanding of Pan-Africanism, as he explicitly locates African community in Africa: "Nothing is more beautiful than an African Village—its harmonious

colorings—its cleanliness . . . and then its people" (645). Empowerment of African identity is premised on the nexus Du Bois identifies between art and an African sense of beauty, as it is "the last and best gift of Africa to the world and the true essence of the black man's soul" (651). He endorses an African essentialism, grounded in an African location as he indicates the close affinity between the individual, culture, and the bounded locus: "African art is the offspring of the African climate and the Negro soul" (651). Yet this complementarity of person and place resists transnational possibilities, and if African community is only available in Africa, Du Bois' desire for diasporic unity is weakened in this denial of intercultural encounter and movement. His seduction by the specifically African site indicates a failure to include in his trajectory the irreversible patterns of African migration which are integral to a contemporary conception of Pan-Africanism such as that presented by McKay. Du Bois' seduction by the landscape renders Africa mythical or unreal as his praise is of the dreamscape rather than a modern and fully realised place of reference: "The spell of Africa is upon me" (646).[33]

However Du Bois' vacillation between his vociferous 1919 rejection of a return to Africa and desire for American citizenship, his middle-class integrationist policies in the 1920s, his romanticisation of Africa of the mid-1920s, and his subsequent migration to Ghana indicates that his own beliefs are bound up with notions of return to this idyll, in an actual performance of the ideal of mass migratory 'return' to Africa as set forth by Garvey. His literary rendering of his captivation by a bewitching Africa tends, however, to weaken his Pan-Africanist voice, because in his depiction of a still-rural and ancient world he actively denies Africa a future of exchange and equality with the modern world of which his followers were

[33] Du Bois' views of Africa in this passage date from 1924-25.

members.[34] By segregating Africa imaginatively from the rest of the world, Du Bois opposes the core transnational philosophy of McKay's narratives, situating it as he does in a figurative topos of isolation: "This is not a country, it is a world—a universe of itself and for itself, a thing different, immense, menacing, alluring" (646). Any notions of intercultural encounter are subdued in this portrait of a self-sufficient Africa, and his particular mode of cultivating Pan-African union paradoxically relies on locating and attributing African 'identity' and value in the rooted and limiting terms of nationalism. The exclusion of the migrants and vagabonds whom McKay actively seeks to reunite in the transnational locus which rejects the pull of nationalism denies the essentialism of Du Boisean Pan-Africanism. In *Banjo*, McKay's African American and African Caribbean seafarers vocalise an alienation from a never-experienced 'homeland.' Even the Nigerian Taloufa "had no immediate intention of returning to West Africa. It was his first trip to this great Provençal port of which he also had heard and dreamed much. And after tasting it for a while he expected to go onto England" (107). Movement is inscribed on the African diasporan consciousness of McKay's characters, and the kind of

[34]In an article in 1932 entitled "A Negro Writer to his Critics" McKay writes: "One of my most considerate critics suggested that I might take a trip to Africa and there write about Negro life in its pure state. But I don't believe that any such place exists anywhere upon the earth today, since modern civilization has touched and stirred the remotest corners. I cherish no Utopian illusions about any state of human society. Poets may dream, but dreams are the ferment of the stuff of experience" (*The Passion* 137). McKay's awareness of the reality of conditions in Africa contradicts Du Bois's lyrical rendering, and as a noted critic of McKay, Du Bois must surely be alluded to here. McKay's cognisance of cultural evolution highlights the reductive stasis attributed to Africa by Garvey and Du Bois.

immersion in the culture proposed by Du Bois fails to excite and unite the New World African diaspora.

Troubling Du Boisean Pan-African rhetoric, however, are his early integrationist policies: "There is nothing so indigenous, so completely 'made in America' as we" (Sundquist 639). His vacillation between poetic Africentric lyricism and the struggle for American citizenship presents a weakened Pan-Africanism, diminished by its reliance upon a nationalistic understanding of identity. McKay's attentiveness to the migratory element of 1920s African American, African Caribbean, and British African life enables him to extol the value of an African ancestry which supports a diversified global diaspora. As Ray argues in *Banjo*: "Getting down to our native roots and building up from our own people . . . is culture" (208). The idea of an unspoilt African paradise to which the modern diaspora can return was challenged by McKay even before he wrote *Banjo*. In his 1922 poem "Outcast" he identifies the irreparable fissure between the Africa of the diasporic history and the reality of the modern migratory life:

> Something in me is lost, forever lost,
> Some vital thing has gone out of my heart,
> And I must walk the way of life a ghost
> Among the sons of earth, a thing apart (9-12)

The alienation of the migrant from his ancestral 'home' does not comport with any narrative of return to Africa as proposed by Du Bois or Garvey. Instead McKay emphasises the peripatetic lives of the migrant masses who demonstrate their absolute denunciation of such projects for 'repatriation': "Africa is benighted. My mother always advised me when I was a kid to get far as farthest from Africa. 'Africa is jungleland,' she used to say; 'there's nothing to learn from it but dark and

dirty doings'" (*Banjo* 94). The relevance of Africa to the modern seafarers is minimal, although negative depictions are balanced by Ray's anxiety: "If this renaissance we're talking about is going to be more than a sporadic and scabby thing, we'll have to get down to our racial roots to create it" (207). *Banjo* extols a realism which advocates an appreciation and an awareness of cultural history, coupled with a desire to engage with a scattered diaspora outside the limits of the African site. The disengagement expressed by Countee Cullen in his poem "Heritage" echoes the plight of the displaced who crave a rooted past, live a routed present, but seek a New World future:

> Africa? A book one thumbs
> Listlessly, till slumber comes.
> Unremembered are her bats
> Circling through the night (32-5)

Cullen depicts an African past as an unfamiliar narrative located in a 'book' which fails to absorb his attention. Cullen's distance from an 'authentically African' identity and from the actual sights and sounds of Africa indicate modern alienation from an African 'home.' As Iain Chambers argues, "If exile presumes an initial home and the eventual promise of a return, the questions met with en route consistently breach the boundaries of such an itinerary" (2).

Garvey's explicit calls to "the Negro peoples of the world" to "concentrate upon the object of building up for themselves a great nation in Africa" also clashes with the Pan-African message espoused by McKay (Blaisdell 69). Ray's belief in the value of African folk culture to the diaspora epitomises McKay's engagement with Pan-African ideals as his philosophical Pan-Africanism includes a dimension of logic and reason lacking in Garvey's extreme and attempted repatriations, tainted as

they are by a reverse imperialism. In *Banjo*, Ray aligns himself with the travelling African diaspora, and it is not solely their shared ancestry, but their mutual wandering which allows him to re-imagine Pan-African possibilities:

> It was no superior condescension, no feeling of race solidarity or Back-to-Africa demonstration that made Ray love the environment of the common black drifters. He loved it with the poetical enthusiasm of the vagabond black that he himself was. (209)

His anti-patriotic ethos penetrates the novel's narrative and his psychological affinity with the diaspora indicates the need to transcend both Garvey's obsession with Africa, and Du Bois' vacillations between American integration and African repatriation. Chambers suggests that "Migrancy . . . involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, identities that are constantly subject to mutation," and Ray actively pursues such fluid conceptions of existence (5). Garvey's aspiration to transport his oft cited 'four hundred million' dispersed African Americans back to Africa is ridiculed by McKay's characters, and in his literary mockery of the movement McKay underlines the deviation of his transnational ideals from the histrionic policies of his contemporaries. As Banjo puts it:

> Marcus Garvey was one nigger who had a chance to make his and hulp other folks make, and he took it and landed himself in prison. That theah Garvey had a white man's chance and he done nigger it away. The white man gived him plenty a rope to live, and all he done do with it was to make a noose to hang himse'f. (79)

The beach dwellers' opinions of 'the Negro Moses' vary from contempt to admiration, while they universally express a desire to pursue lives of vagabondage and temporary affiliation, indicating again McKay's refusal to subscribe to extant theories of Pan-Africanism.

Gilroy delineates a theory of two opposing black consciousnesses, which, when employed to deconstruct notions of various Pan-African aesthetics, can help us to understand McKay's uniquely transnational brand of politics; they embody a "strategic essentialism" of the kind which Gilroy defines as a "pluralistic position which affirms blackness as an open signifier and seeks to celebrate complex representations of black particularity that is internally divided: by class, sexuality, gender, age, ethnicity, economics and political consciousness" (32). Rather than insisting on one universally knowable 'African' character, McKay depicts a diaspora connected by a common ancestry, yet one which accommodates variegated personalities which thrive on encounter and intercultural engagement globally. 'Subjectivities,' rather than a singular subjectivity, offer a more appropriate understanding of the self, as is suggested by Grewal in a feminist, postmodern context which is nonetheless apposite to an understanding of McKay, as it accommodates both the multiple encounters and movements characteristic of his life, and the collectives depicted in his fictions:

> There can be syncretic, 'immigrant,' cross-cultural, and plural subjectivities, which can enable a politics through positions that are coalitions, intransigent, in process, and contradictory. Such identities are enabling because they provide a mobility in solidarity that leads to a transnational participation in understanding and opposing multiple and global oppressions operating upon them; that is, these subject

> positions enable oppositions in multiple locations. ("Autobiographic Subjects and Diasporic Locations" 234)

Nonetheless, Garvey's politics sporadically share McKay's awareness of the nature of African diasporic dispersal. Garvey declares:

> An intelligent people know that one's nationality has nothing to do with great ideals and great principles. . . . I know no national boundary where the Negro is concerned. The whole world is my province until Africa is free. (Blaisdell 10)

His use of anti-nationalist motifs of transgressing boundaries indicates a cognisance of the profound displacement of the migrant, an understanding contributed to significantly by his own 'outsider' position as a Jamaican in America, which he notoriously likened to the experience of Jesus, Moses, and Lafayette. Unlike Du Bois' early desires for American assimilation, Garvey rejects this preoccupation with a repeated call to the "scattered millions of Africa's sons and daughters" whom he attempts to reunite (48). His use of the term 'boundary' speaks to McKay's emphasis on the transgression of borders, and his construction of a populace which exists beyond the margins of Western society is a motif which is interwoven into all of McKay's narratives. Although imperfect and frequently imperial, the construction of diaspora as proposed by Garvey addresses one of the key weaknesses in Du Bois' Pan-African discourse, prompting Du Bois to incorporate elements of Garvey's vision into his own writing:

> His reasoning was at first new and inexplicable to Americans because he brought to the United States a new Negro problem. We think of our problem here as the Negro problem . . . We have not hitherto been so clear as to the way in which the problem of the Negro in the United

> States differs from the problem of the Negro in the West Indies. (Sundquist 266)

Yet Garvey's African nationalism is as reductive, inevitably, as Du Bois' American nationalist ideals, and the inclusivist Pan-Africanism espoused in *Banjo* derives ultimately from McKay's personal peripatetic West Indian existence.

Crucial to this consideration of McKay's Pan-Africanism is his sporadic residence in North Africa between 1928 and 1933, well after Du Bois and Garvey had begun theorising Africa. Travelling to Casablanca in 1928, McKay encountered an affiliation which transgressed the limits of nationalism: "At last I arrived in Casablanca. . . . The first shock I registered was the realization that they looked and acted exactly like certain peasants of Jamaica" (*ALWFH* 296*).* McKay identifies a shared character which is specifically defined as a transatlantically divided but resilient transnational peasant tradition. While Garvey and Du Bois rhapsodised about returning to an Africa they conceived of as a blank canvas upon which they could build a new 'nation,' McKay lived among African natives, thus endowing his particular conception of Pan-Africanism with a certain verisimilitude and sensitivity. Detailing his encounters in Casablanca with members of the Gueanoua tribe, and recalling his completion of *Banjo* in Rabat (297-300), McKay participated in modern African life while cultivating his own personal affiliation with the African landscape: "I myself had gravitated instinctively to the native element because physically and psychically I felt more affinity with it" (301). Yet rather than seeing this as contradicting his fictional characters' reluctance to go to Africa, it is paramount to highlight McKay's emphasis on the value of tribal life, which he believed served as a model for the African diaspora internationally and which could serve to mend the fissure in collective unity which hinders transnational affiliation. His desire is to

utilise the African group social life transnationally to facilitate a rejuvenated and culturally specific identity, as earlier advocated by Ray, in *Banjo.* In urban America, McKay suggests the transposing of African customs to fortify diasporic affiliation, rather than promoting an untenable mass migration to Africa: "Wherever I traveled in Europe and Africa I was impressed by the phenomenon of the emphasis on group life. . . . The American Negro group is the most advanced in the world. . . . But it sadly lacks a group soul" (*ALWFH* 349-50). The 'group soul' is proposed as a pragmatic solution to feelings of displacement among the African American collective. The strength of the now transnational African spirit is the method of understanding adopted by Ray to secure his place in the world as an educated Haitian who craves group life:

> Ray had felt buttressed by the boys with a rough strength and sureness that gave him spiritual passion and pride to be his human self in an inhumanly alien world. . . . Ray wanted to hold on to his intellectual acquirements without losing his instinctive gifts. The black gifts of laughter and melody and simple sensuous feelings and responses. (332-3)

It is neither necessary nor feasible to return to Africa for McKay's seafarers and vagabonds, and yet the African diaspora in all its modern evolutions can draw from a past which, McKay writes, will support "a new group orientation" (*ALWFH* 354).

Avoiding the zeal of Garvey or the elitism of Du Bois, McKay forges a Pan-Africanism which incorporates racial, political, sexual and locational concerns. The binary of nationalism and masculine dominance proposed by Martin Delany, the oft-cited 'Father of American Black Nationalism' is contested, as Delany's belief in the hyper-masculine patriarch who restores the 'family' unit and thus repairs black

nationalist disunity is undermined by McKay's reckless and uncommitted vagabonds. Gilroy suggests of Delany that he

> was probably the first black thinker to make the argument that the integrity of the race is primarily the integrity of its male heads of household and secondarily the integrity of the families over which they preside. The model he proposed aligned the power of the male head of household in the private sphere with the noble status of the soldier citizen which complemented it in the public realm. (25)

As Breda Gray theorises: "There is a vested interest in cultivating the desire to belong, to be part of a recognisable 'family' that will provide a relatively stable anchor for identity in what it identifies as an uncertain and changing world" (150). The opposition of Delany's ideal to McKay's deconstructed family unit in Marseilles in the 1920s again indicates the unsuitability of these Pan-African philosophies available to the African diaspora in a modern context, as the seafarers and vagabonds of *Banjo* repudiate the role of patriarch in favour of lives devoid of responsibility in the urban locus. McClintock's suggestion that "nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies" and offer "a 'natural' figure for sanctioned national hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interests" highlights the ideology against which McKay was struggling; his deviation from this model accentuates his discomfort with the nation, and with the stereotypical roles of patriarchy which are ascribed by traditional models of national society (357). Although McClintock's analysis focuses on women's marginalisation by nationalistic institutions, her theory is applicable to the liminal seafarers who are as resilient to the patriarchal norms of patriotism. The 'integrity' of the family is failed by the vagabond, as Ray and Jake both admit to shirking their roles as fathers and husbands; Ray declares he left "more things than I

want to remember" in Harlem, and Jake admits that domesticity was suffocating: "it was no joymaking business . . . to go to work reg'lar ehvery day and come home ehvery night to the same ole pillow. . . . it was too much home stuff" (302-3). Bjornson, in his delineation of the Spanish origins and European development of the picaresque narrative, writes:

> During their respective journeys, picaresque heroes continually come in contact with a constantly changing reality outside the self. In situations exacerbated by rootlessness and poverty, they may or may not become delinquents, but they are invariably confronted by a choice between social conformity (which is necessary to survival) and adherence to what they have learned to consider true or virtuous. Their responses to this double-bind situation reflect an author's implicit assumptions about the self and the fictional universe in which people become aware of themselves. (11)

Yet, typically, McKay challenges the 'norms' of the very literary tradition with which he is engaging, as his thinly disguised surrogate picaros are faithful only to what they desire, and pay little attention to hetero-normative social conformity; staying in the domestic realm would be to 'conform', and yet both reject this in favour of the 'truth' of their homo-centric vagabond lifestyle which they understand to be the only mode of survival. McKay's own worldview is apparent in this authorial resistance to the expected role of the picaro.

McKay also undermines the type of masculinity extolled in Delany's *Blake; or the Huts of America* where the Cuban Carolus Henrico Blacus (Henry Blake) risks his life to recover his enslaved wife and to lead a slave revolt in Cuba—he is the archetypal patriarch of Delany's philosophy. Finding his wife, he consciously

equates personal victory with racial redemption: “This is your husband, poor outraged suffering one, and he comes to take you, if in doing it, he takes the life of every slaveholder in Cuba!” (181). Blake positions himself as both husband and soldier and his journey through America, Cuba and Africa is stimulated by an explicit desire to restore his family which the slave trade destroyed, while also emancipating the enslaved:

> My wife is sold away from me by a man who is one of the leading members of the very church to which both she and I belong! . . . I and my wife have been both robbed of our liberty, and you want me to be satisfied with a hope of heaven. I won’t do any such thing; I have waited long enough on heavenly promises; I’ll wait no longer. (16)

Juxtapose this with McKay’s men and their use of travel to escape marital or parental roles, and their chosen vagabondage is seen as a perversion of the noble motivations of Blake’s movement. They cannot conform to the lofty ideals of Delany’s nationalist paradigm, and in their failure to do so they are potentially emasculated. This crisis of masculinity is, however, deflected by McKay, as he permits the men a life of unhindered vagabondage in which they pursue women for pleasure but journey with men as the means of survival and companionship. In this deformation of Delany’s aspirations, McKay again toys with the gender roles ascribed by society, and the seafarers resist sublimation into cultural demands for stereotypes and ‘norms’. Their homosocial priorities disturb their participation in a nationalistic diaspora, and as the patriarchal figuration of family and nation suggests, heterosexuality is deemed the ‘norm’ in conceptions of diaspora. Although Gray is writing about female experiences of Irish migration to London in the 1990s, her

evocation of a gendered and limited diaspora addresses the similar predicament of McKay's vagabonds:

> The heteronormative notion of the global Irish family constitutively excludes Irish lesbian and gay diasporas because these cannot be accounted for in a familial language of genealogy. Same-sex desire in the diaspora constitutes different non-heteronormative spaces and imaginings of diaspora. (156)

The exclusion of relationships which are not structured according to familial prototypes from group affiliation resonates with McKay's repeated literary deconstruction of family. The idea of divergent 'imaginings of diaspora' indicates the need to extend the parameters of an inclusive diaspora; as the affinity between McKay's fiction of the 1920s and Gray's theory of the early twenty-first century indicates, there is a tendency to create hierarchies both within and without the community of the globally dispersed. Gray's assertions support the problematic vision of diasporan identity elucidated in McKay's novel. The disavowal of heterosexual familial structures and stereotypes results not merely in exclusion from a global 'diaspora,' but is suggestive of a diminished connection to a shared origin, as Gray suggests:

> the trope of the global Irish family limits imaginings of affiliation and cultures of belonging by privileging notions of kin, a possessive relationship between the 'homeland' and the diaspora, and by locating a narrative of economic success based on multi-location at the heart of Irish global modernity. (156)

McKay's personal marginality from hegemonic Pan-African solidarity and from African American and African Caribbean cultural movements is thus reflective of

the emphasis placed by diasporan movements on homelands and family units, and his literary rendering of a marginalised diaspora which subsists in the peripheral and shifting port locus serves to further underline the motivations for McKay's peripatetic patterns.

Like McKay, Delany lived a life of personal migrancy, moving across states in the American context in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Emigrating to Canada, and subsequently visiting Africa, from this peripatetic experience comes a fervent nationalism which limits transnational participation and focuses on the cultivation of a black nation, be it in South America or any bounded locus:

> Delany's primary concern was not with Africa as such but rather with the forms of citizenship and belonging that arose from the (re)generation of modern nationality in the form of an autonomous, black nation state. (Gilroy 23) [35]

McKay was not primarily concerned with Africa or any particular site for the rejuvenation of an African American and African Caribbean diaspora and he transcended the preoccupations of Delany, Du Bois and Garvey in their insistence on

[35] Delany proposed mass migration to Nicaragua as a version of Black Zionism. Gilroy delineates: "Delany looks immediately to Jewish experiences of dispersal as a model for comprehending the history of black Americans, and more significantly still, cites this history as a means to focus his own Zionist proposals for black American colonisation of Nicaragua and elsewhere" (23). Other philosophies of Pan-Africanism also referred to Jewish diasporan Zionism as a model to understand the African America diaspora; Du Bois writes: "The African movement means to us what the Zionist movement must mean to the Jews, the centralization of race effort and the recognition of a racial fount" (Sundquist 639-40). Garvey drew on a similar motif: "We shall gather together our children, our treasures and our loved ones, and, as the children of Israel, by the command of God, faced the promised land, so in time we shall also stretch forth our hands and bless our country" (Blaisdell 168).

a specific and rooted concept of identity. However, even within these nationalistic Pan-Africanisms there are tensions; where Delany saw the need to make Africa a more viable location for a westernised nineteenth-century migrant community, Garvey advocated a rashly conceived repatriation:

> fighting for the founding of a Negro nation in Africa, so that there will be no clash between black and white and that each race will have a separate existence and civilization all on its own without courting suspicion and hatred or eyeing each other with jealousy and rivalry within the borders of the same country. (Blaisdell 9)

McKay rejects the nationalism which binds the theories of these three 'leaders' of the Pan-African movement. Rather than suggesting that black nationalism is unfeasible, he renovates their theories in *Banjo* to cultivate a diasporan identity which, although not based on any American or African essentialist paradigm, celebrates transcendent identities which are based wholly on interaction, both with the past, but also between the New World African migrants. This is neither to reduce the importance of African ancestry, nor to privilege Western culture, but McKay's characters attempt to balance the weight of the past and present in Marseilles, and through their constant travels they construct an identity which is acknowledged as imperfect, liminal and often oppressed. Nonetheless, theirs is an identity which pertains to a certain past and an uncertain future:

> The more Ray mixed in the rude anarchy of the lives of the black boys . . . the more he felt that they represented more than he or the cultured minority the irrepressible exuberance and legendary vitality of the black race. And the thought kept him wondering how that race would

> fare under the ever tightening mechanical organization of modern life. (334)

McKay moves beyond specific racial concerns in his theorising of diaspora when he identifies an even greater threat to culture, as capitalism represents the most recent evolution in a continuum of neo-colonialism. For McKay the urgency is not to find a suitable national identity or nation, but to sustain the valuable inheritance of the past in an ever-changing world: "For Ray happiness was the highest good, and difference the greatest charm, of life. The hand of progress was robbing his people of many primitive and beautiful qualities" (335). Industry, commerce and the banality of Babbitt-type Western life threatens what Ray sees as the particularly valuable African cultural inheritance of the diaspora, as there is a risk that this emergent materialistic 'civilization' will erase precious ethnic possessions:

> For civilization has gone out among these native, earthy people, had despoiled them of their primitive soil, had uprooted, enchained, transported, and transformed them to labor under its laws, and yet lacked the spirit to tolerate them within its walls. (324)

Slavery, colonialism, and now capitalism threaten the minority, and Ray's fears are not unfounded; McKay depicts in Harlem and Marseilles a marginalised and submerged social collective which is excluded from the socio-political mainstream by the American and French authorities and which is not always a position to be celebrated. However, Ray's musings on the issue of his African Haitian inheritance, his American experience and present French residence are fundamentally optimistic:

> But a black man, even though educated, was in closer biological kinship to the swell of primitive earth life. And maybe his apparent failing under the organization of the modern world was the real

> strength that preserved him from becoming the thing that was the common white creature of it. (333)

At this juncture, McKay delineates his understanding of the diasporan experience of fragmentation with the past, and thus explicates his version of a Pan-Africanism which seeks to realistically engage with both modernity and an African cultural heritage. As McKay wrote in the *New York Herald-Tribune Books* in 1932:

> I can see no reason why an Aframerican intellectual should go to any part of Africa to undertake an experiment in living unless he felt irresistibly forced to do so. Negroid Africa will produce in time its own modern poets and artists peculiar to its soil. The Aframerican may gain in spiritual benefits by returning in spirit to this African origin, but he will remain a unique product of Western Civilization, with something of himself to give that will be very different from anything that may come out of a purely African community. (Cooper, *The Passion* 137)

In this particular interaction with Western cultural hegemony is the suggestion that rather than shed the distinguishing facets of an African ancestry, the diaspora can employ these to sustain identity in its transnational character. Characteristically, McKay's literary conclusions are ambivalent. Ray reflects:

> Traveling away from America and visiting many countries, observing and appreciating the differences of human groups, making contact with earthy blacks of tropical Africa, where the great body of his race existed, had stirred in him the fine intellectual prerogative of doubt. (335)

It is through movement that affiliation occurs, and McKay ceaselessly promotes the innate importance to self-knowledge and to transnational community formation of migrancy. Even as McKay resists confirming any certainties in the New World African diasporan future, he insists on the peripatetic life which paradoxically provides unity. Ray and Banjo leave Marseilles together at the end of *Banjo*, replicating and transforming the action of flight of Jake and Felice at the end of *Home to Harlem*. Ray leaves Marseilles on a ship, and so the motif of masculine migrancy is endorsed, as Banjo denies any question of Latnah's accompanying them: "A woman is a conjunction. Gawd fixed her different from us in moh ways than one. And theah's things we can git away with all the time and she just kain't. Come on, pardner" (335). Neither France, nor America, nor any other aggressively nationalistic country can support the transnational and predominantly male collective in the longer term, and this critique of both nations serves to undermine the tenets of patriotism upon which they build their imagined power.

It is this engagement with, and resistance to, notions of nationalism which supports an exploration of *Banjo* as a key text in the stimulation of the Négritude movement. McKay anticipates its globalised figuration which draws on the Harlem Renaissance, Haitian Indigenism, European Surrealism and West African cultural drives. The quest to transcend the limits of French and American nationalisms allows McKay's particular influence on Négritude to reflect its transnational character. The importance of *Banjo* to intellectuals living in Paris in the interwar years has been asserted, and its universal relevance and international origins undermines the often assumed French birthplace of Négritude. Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of the leading Senegalese voices of the movement recognised this transnational quality: "It is thus that in terms of the general meaning of the word [Négritude]—the discovery of black

values and the recognition for the Negro of his situation—was born in the United States" (qtd. in Jack 32). This attribution of Négritude to an American origin references the nature of African diasporic displacement, but also suggests an awareness of a Pan-African community which Négritude seeks to unify ideologically, if not actually. McKay's personal migrancy and the continuous fragmentation of his Caribbean identity embodies the central philosophy behind Négritude, as it recognises the interculturalism which facilitates cultural creativity and which is so pertinent to McKay's liminal seafarers. Étienne Léro, writing in the journal *Légitime Défense* in Paris in 1932, drew encouragement from the Jamaican McKay's black 'American' fiction: "Le vent qui monte de l'Amérique noire aura vite fait, espérons-le, de nettoyer nos Antilles des fruits avortés d'une culture caduque" ("The wind rising from black America will quickly cleanse our Antilles of the aborted fruit of an obsolete culture"; 12; Edwards 187).[36] The re-imagining of

[36] *Banjo* was translated into French by the Communist Paul Vaillant-Couturier and his wife Ida Treat and published in France in 1932, having been published in the U.S. in 1929. It was the first of McKay's works of fiction to be translated into French. Much critical thought suggests Vaillant-Couturier and Treat overemphasised the Communist aspect of the text in translating it, which is broadly seen as a misleading flaw in the translation, as McKay was always cautious about his critical engagement with overweening political philosophies in his literature. I would here suggest that more than Edwards's suggestion that "Banjo would appear to mark a shift in McKay's political focus away from the proletariat, traditionally conceived, and towards such cosmopolitan communities of men", McKay's attention shifted instead to *diasporan* communities of men, and that his ever pressing quest for a re-imagined concept of 'home' amidst the chaos of transatlantic migrancy became an even greater concern than any class or political distinction (199). The cosmopolitan zone highlighted by Edwards is also a problematic point of departure, perhaps, for an analysis of McKay, rather than a stable destination for critique, considering McKay's narrative progression from Harlem, to Marseilles, to a rural Caribbean setting in his last published novel, *Banana Bottom* (1933).

the Atlantic wind as life-affirming and re-awakening the Caribbean, a wind which so notoriously supported the slave ships across the Atlantic, suggests a diasporic reconstruction of the history of dispersal. Léro's binding together of France, the Caribbean and America is appealed to by McKay's effort at diasporic unification in the celebration of African transnational affiliation. The cognisance of the influence of the three 'points' of the Atlantic triangle on this cultural movement endows Négritude with a veracity missing in the philosophies of Garvey and Du Bois, and this reworking of the previously disconnected sites of slavery and trauma reflects the value of *Banjo*. As McKay's men left the U.S. and Harlem, and came to France in search of personal and group liberty, his narrative embodies the very interculturalism espoused by the French African and French Caribbean intellectuals. As Michel Fabre suggests of the migratory patterns synonymous with the 1920s: "life was riper, culture mellower, and artistic things considered of higher worth in France—or they were prompted to flee from the Puritan denial of sex and artistic freedom" (92). In this conception of exile is the recognition of the value to art of new and original thought brought by the migrant from America to France, and the receptive quality of intellectualism in Paris can be seen to distract from concerns about national or even class-based identities. What is emphasised is the exchange of culture, which Léro explicitly cites as uniting African and American heritage:

> Langston Hughes et Claude Mac-Kay [sic], les deux poétes noirs révolutionnaires, nous ont apporté, marinés dans l'alcool rouge, l'amour africain de la vie, le joie africain de l'amour, la rêve africain de la mort" ("Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, two revolutionary black poets, have brought us marinated in red alcohol, the African

> love of life, the African joy of love, the African dream of death"; *Légitime Défense* 12; Fabre 155).

The vital nature of poetry and imaginative production is defined as the essence which unites the diaspora, and upon which life can be cultivated.

The Martinican Nardal sisters, Paulette and Jeanne, editors of the bi-lingual Parisian magazine *La Revue Du Monde Noir,* also expressed a fervent belief in the transnational nature of Négritude, and their sensitivity to the need to transcend nationalisms to strengthen black culture draws on McKay's efforts in *Banjo.* In their first editorial in 1931 they set out their goals:

> Creér entre les Noirs du monde entier, sans distinction de nationalité, un lien intellectual et moral qui leur permette de se mieux connaître, de s'aimer fraternellement, de défendre plus efficacement leurs intérêts collectifs et d'illustrer leur Race, tel est le triple but que poursuivra «La Revue Du Monde Noir» (The triple aim which La Revue du Monde Noir will pursue, will be: to create among the Negroes of the entire world, regardless of nationality, an intellectual and moral tie which will permit them to better know each other, to love one another, to defend more effectively their collective interests and to glorify their race; *La Revue Du Monde Noir* 3-4)

Not unlike Garvey's aims with his International Convention of the Negroes of the World in Liberty Hall, the importance of group affiliation is highlighted if racial uplift is to occur. Whether McKay had the desire to 'glorify their race' with *Banjo* is debatable, yet the adoption of the novel by the Négritude movement as a representative text indicates a genuine engagement with McKay. Césaire's analysis of *Banjo* as "really one of the first works in which an author spoke of the Negro and

gave him a certain literary dignity" positions the novel at the epicentre of transatlantic African diasporan identity rejuvenation (*Discourse on Colonialism* 87). McKay's evasion of national identification reverberates in this understanding of his novel's influence on the Négritude movement, and the vociferous rejection of patriotism by the Haitian Ray intensifies McKay's discomfort with the nationalist drive to construct barriers. His distancing of his work from the weight of French and American patriotism is indicative, perhaps, of what Pease calls "antinational nationalism" which, as a "counter-hegemonic literary hybrid" usually wielded by the postcolonial intellectual is employed as a "strategic weapon in the struggle against cultural imperialism" ("National Narratives, Postnational Narration" 9).[37] Countering French cultural imperialism, the vagabonds insist on their chosen lifestyle despite authoritarian assimilationist operations, and as his fictional characters defy cultural absorption, the novel itself becomes a symbolic 'strategic weapon' used by French subscribers to the tenets of Négritude to evade subsumption into the French national narrative.

Resistance to French cultural and political nationalism is central to McKay's depiction of the African diasporan situation in *Banjo*, and it is frequently suggested that it is McKay's criticism of French duplicity which so appealed to the West Indian

[37] Jahan Ramazani suggests that poets of the modernist era such as McKay can also be defined (ideologically, because McKay was factually a British colonial subject) as postcolonial. Ramazani identifies "a cross hemispheric and transhistorical common terrain, to explore significant points of intersection between" the two literary models (118). Through McKay's use of subversive poetic technique and his complex relationship with modernity, civilisation, and its effect on subjected people, he is an appropriate spokesperson for both modernism and postcolonialism. Pease's argument resonates profoundly with the literary cultivation of Négritude, and with the movement's use of *Banjo* as a representative text.

and African communities in Paris. The French colonial persona and the French liberal persona interact tensely in *Banjo,* which exposes the ambivalent attitude of the French to the African:

> The French are never tired of proclaiming themselves the most civilized people in the world. They think they understand Negroes, because they don't discriminate against us in their bordels. They imagine that Negroes like them. But Senghor, the Senegalese, told me that the French were the most calculatingly cruel of all the Europeans in Africa. (277)

McKay wrote of his own experience of French life, affirming his characters' opinions as he contrasts French control in the colonial and national context:

> I had a wonderful time of it in Africa. . . . I did not want to leave if it were not that the French are masters there, and I prefer to live under the French in France where the government is more liberal bossing its own people. . . . The French are the cleverest propagandists in the world. They hate colored people, yet they pretend they are liberal because they have a liberal tradition to live up to. (Cooper, *The Passion* 148)

This notion of historical duplicity is supported by Miller's analysis of a France which nurtured abolitionism and yet saw the material benefits of slavery as essential. Miller suggests:

> France would often seek to have it both ways, by asserting that enslavement saved (freed) the soul of the slave. . . . Throughout colonial and postcolonial history France will often be torn between its

> magnanimous, liberal impulses (religious at first, then humanitarian) and its desire to dominate and profit. (20-1)

The pillars of the French constitution, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, are challenged in *Banjo* and McKay's questioning of the black place in a predominantly white political system is debated by the vagabonds. America and France are weighed and measured for their claims to liberate the oppressed. McKay's vagabonds contest the French 'possession' of Négritude by their inclusion of America in reflections on white political hegemony, and in their specific delineation of black life in France and America the men endorse an internationalist Négritude: "France is no better than America. In fact, America is better every time for a colored man" (*Banjo* 75). Even though there is some recognition of relative freedom in the American North, McKay's narrative flight from America identifies the need for a locus for African diasporan life beyond the limited possibilities of the U.S. or France, which both threaten African selfhood: "There was nothing left to the African nobility but 'bull.' Ask Europe about that, especially France, which was the biggest hog in Africa" (76). France is aggressively assimilative, while America cultivates an exclusive identity. Ray sees in both the unifying element of racism:

> He was just crammed full of the much-touted benefits of French civilization—especially for colored people. . . . Ray looked deeper than the noise for the truth, and what he really found was a fundamental contempt for black people quite as pronounced as in the Anglo-Saxon lands. (285-6)

Although a better life may be available for the diaspora in France than for the natives living under French colonial authority in Africa, Ray isolates the racial discrimination which underpins all Anglo-Saxon encounters with African

communities, and which serves to highlight the falsity of French liberal policies, thus appealing to the intellectuals behind the Négritude movement. McKay identified the strength of the bond of racism and nationalism in France and French territories: "I dislike them because they are the most nationalistic people in the world, and they are never tired of saying they are the nation destined to keep the torch of civilization burning" (Cooper, *The Passion* 148).

Bourne early recognised the American obsession with an archaic and limiting nationalism which resonates with McKay's assessment of French imperialism. In the repudiation of both countries' aspirant imperialism is McKay's echoing of Bourne's 1916 theory:

> to seek no other goal than the weary old nationalism,—belligerent, exclusive, inbreeding, the poison of which we are now witnessing in Europe,—is to make patriotism a hollow sham, and to declare that in spite of our boastings, America must ever be a follower and not a leader of nations. (91)

Yet embedded in Bourne's critique is the culturally prevalent fixation with the nation-state, nationalism and leadership. McKay's writing of just over a decade later indicates an advance in his advocacy of transnationality which transcends the boundary of the modern nation-state. McKay figures Western civilization as essentially harmful to African group life, and neither France nor America in their positions of nations and empires can support a diverse multiculturalism without fearing that same diversity. This ideology is epitomised by Ray's easy understanding of his fellow dock dweller, Goosey's, use of the moniker "United Snakes":

> The simile struck Ray's imagination, giving him a terrible vision of Old Glory transformed into wriggling snakes and the stars poisonous

> heads lifted to strike at an agonized black man writhing in the midst of them. (123)[38]

McKay's attitude to the nationalistic and capitalistic antagonism of France and America is conveyed without ambivalence. As a colonial subject, there is a residual autobiographical response contained in his assertion that

> He hated civilization because its general attitude toward the colored man was such as to rob him of his warm human instincts and make him inhuman. . . . Only within the confines of his own world of color could he be his true self. But so soon as he entered the great white world . . . that entire world, high, low, middle, unclassed, all conspired to make him painfully conscious of color and race. (171)

A vivid distinction between the subject and the controlling power is emphasised, recalling the globally oppressed situation of numerous collectives. Ray asks Banjo:

> Could he not see what Anglo-Saxon standards were doing to some of the world's most interesting peoples? Some Jews ashamed of being Jews. Changing their names and their religion . . . for the Jesus of the Christians. The Irish objecting to the artistic use of their own rich idioms. . . . No being ashamed for Ray. Rather than lose his soul, let intellect go to hell and live instinct! (172)

[38] This idea of a deceitful America which failed to protect its African American population was intensely felt by McKay throughout his life. In a letter written by McKay in August 1945, he vehemently denies the existence of democracy in America, and considers it as great a falsity in the aftermath of World War Two, as it was in 1919: "Now that the atomic bomb has ended the war, Negroes will have to watch their step. . . . Their leaders have led them up a tree, the fake tree of democracy, from which they cannot even see the pitfalls under them."

Recalling Pease's idea of the strategic use of a literary device, Ray consciously cultivates a black cultural, albeit personal, resilience to the damaging effects of white socio-political hegemony, and the novel functions even more intensely as a vehicle for Négritude in its awareness of the value of a folk heritage to a modern diaspora. The stultifying effect of white culture on African community life is not merely damaging in the colonial context, and as McKay buttresses the diasporic collective against assimilation or complete segregation, he counters the type of identity theft occurring in an imperial context, the effects of which are explicated in René Maran's *Batouala.*

Maran illustrates in his novel precisely the kind of abuses which McKay's seafarers imagine to be occurring in Africa. Ray is aware of the governmental consent

> under whose regime the West African Negroes were being torn out of their native soil, wrenched away from their families and shipped to Europe to get acquainted with the arts of war and the disease of syphilis. (*Banjo* 287)

The motif of syphilitic modernity is repeated in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, and McKay posits it symbolically as the ultimate marker of the destructive potential of the 'progress' to which the West African succumbs in his encounter with Europe and to which Césaire also alludes in his *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*:

> Et la voix prononce que L'Europe nous a pendant
> des siècles gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences (124)
> And the voice pronounces
> that Europe has been stuffing us with lies and bloating us with pestilence for centuries (Rosello and Pritchard 125)

If syphilis represents the ills of European progress and a specifically white modernity in McKay and Césaire's evocations, then McKay compounds this verdict with material evidence in his journalistic writing. Responding to the gross racism of the London based *Daily Herald's* headline in 1920, "Black Scourge in Europe: Sexual Horror Let Loose by France on Rhine" (concerning France's deployment of African colonial troops along the Rhine), McKay argues that

> If the black troops are syphilitic, they have been contaminated by the white world. According to competent white investigators, syphilis is a disease peculiar to white and yellow peoples; where it is known among the blacks it has been carried thither by the whites. (Cooper, *The Passion* 56)

Ray's decision to renounce the draw of intellectualism and "enlightened" modern life and instead give himself to a life of vagabondage allows him to avoid being ensnared by the national 'civilizing' project of French or American authority. Maran's 1920 preface to *Batouala* shares McKay's contempt for the corrosive force of the coloniser, which he explicitly identifies as bound to the European sense of its monopoly on civility:

> After all if they fall like flies by the thousand and rot in starvation, it is because their country is being 'developed.' Let them disappear, those who do not adapt themselves to civilization. Civilization, civilization, pride of the Europeans and charnel-house of innocents. . . . You have built your kingdom on corpses. (9-10)

Both West Indian writers accentuate Euro-American culpability in African misery, and although Maran limits his critique to life in Africa, McKay demonstrates that

diasporan liberty in Europe is tenuous, and not necessarily a sign of progress. In *The Negroes in America,* McKay writes:

> The good treatment of individuals from those whom they meet in France is valued so highly by Negroes that they are beginning to forget about the vile exploitation of Africans by the French. . . . it knows nothing at all about the barbarous acts of the French in Senegal. . . . It is possible that the Negro intelligentsia does not want to know about all this, inasmuch as now it can loosely generalize about the differences in the treatment of Negroes in bourgeois France and plutocratic America. (50-2)[39]

Addressing this selective dearth in awareness is *Banjo's* message of colonial inequality: reaching the reading audience of middle-class America was surely McKay's intention. McKay's own migrancy between America, France and North Africa permits his critique of Western control in all its guises, and as a colonial British subject his envisaging of a transnational and 'motley' collective who live beyond the majority but engage meaningfully with one another lends credence to his transcendent identity. Having extensively propounded the merits of counter-hegemonic minority affiliation, McKay cultivates a contemporary diasporan solidarity which is nourished, not reduced, by its transience.

Prompting the continued migrancy of the vagabonds and the Négritude movement itself is what Miller defines as "the impossibility of return" which "defines diaspora" (55). *Banjo* is characterised by a continuity of movement facilitated by the port, and

[39] *The Negroes in America* was a text written by McKay and translated into Russian when written in 1923 by McKay while on his Russian mission to personally experience Communism in 1922-1923. It explored the conditions of life of African Americans in America.

typified by the chance meeting in Marseilles of Ray and Jake from *Home to Harlem.* Jake brings to Marseilles the memories and atmosphere of Harlem and for Banjo, he brings sentiments of 'home,' as Banjo declares he would "love to see a couple of brown chappies from Gawd's own show this Ditch some decent movement—turn themselves jazzing loose in a back-home, brownskin Harlem way" (49). As for Ray, he dreams of the rural Haitian idyll of his childhood, and returns in his imagination to his homeland, and yet his unconscious mind conjures visions of "the fascinating forms of Harlem. The thick, sweaty, syrup-sweet jazzing of Sheba palace" (294). Neither Ray nor Banjo were born in Harlem, and yet for both men it interrupts their engagement with a familial past and they construct their pasts only in the terms of sensuous social life available to them in the context of group nightlife. Considered by Miller as "the central trope of Négritude," the 'impossible return' motif becomes a characteristic trait of life in the port, and in this sense of absolute irreparable separation from a knowable past, McKay anticipates Césaire and the difficulties which the Créolistes have with his Francophone focus in *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* (93). Miller's sense that in the *Cahier* "there is no more Africa to go home to" expresses an alienation we may also attribute to McKay as both West Indian men are troubled by the colonial impact on African and Caribbean life (333). The transnational lens through which Césaire was constructing diasporan experience follows McKay's alertness to dispersal. Although Césaire was seen to deny an independent Créole culture by looking outside the Caribbean for inspiration, both McKay and Césaire can more accurately be seen as early advocates for transnational unification which laments and vociferously recalls the trauma of West Indian history while it charts the African diasporan presence in the wider world, seen here in Césaire's *Cahier*:

Et je me dis Bordeaux et Nantes et Liverpool et New York San Francisco
Par un bout de ce monde qui ne porte mon empreinte digitale
et mon calcanéum sur le dos des grate-ciel et ma crasse
dans le scintillement des gemmes!
Qui peut se vanter d'avoir mieux que moi? (90)
And I tell myself Bordeaux and Nantes and Liverpool and New York and San Francisco
not a piece of this world that does not bear my fingerprints
and my calcaneus on the backs of skyscrapers and my filth
in the glitter of gems!
Who can make better claim? (Rosello and Pritchard 91)

Césaire recalls the horrors of enslavement and displacement which was a consequence of the middle passage. His poetic rendering of the West's capitalist expansion is matched by McKay's allusion to the same history, as he describes on the docks of Marseilles the "eternal harvest of the world. . . . African hard wood, African rubber, African ivory, African skins" (317). McKay's use of the word 'skins' in this context is a reminder of the human cost of these goods, and conversely of the paltry remuneration to the African whose labour and resources are still supporting the global economy in the 1920s. Characterising McKay and Césaire's literary works is a distinct sense of liminality, but also a duality which is revealed in their recollections of the Caribbean which come to us through a diasporan and transnational lens.

Both men write of West Indian and African ancestry from a French locus, and so embody the doubleness embodied by the Yoruba god Legba who paradoxically

connects them to Caribbean spirit culture through the figurative gateway over which he presides. The Yoruba and Fon figure of Esu-Elegbara, or Legba, the voodoo spirit of gateways, crossroads, and thresholds is an appropriate icon for the duality and transcendent possibilities of Marseilles. In its role as a gateway to and from Africa it is also a figure which reflects McKay and Cesaire's awkward relation to the West Indian past and their European experience of the present.

Legba underscores McKay's narrative awareness of an African literary past which he implicitly interweaves into his diasporic novel. The embodiment of the 'in-between,' Legba mediates between the known and the unknown, and this resonates powerfully with McKay's evocation of an encounter space in Marseilles for the diaspora. This also recalls Doyle's analysis of the microcosm, as the port reflects the global shifts of people and cultures which create intercultural possibilities. Henry Louis Gates Jr. posits Legba as presiding over "liminal crossroads, a sensory threshold barely perceptible" (*The Signifying Monkey* 6). The imperceptibility of boundaries in Gates' understanding of Legba's domain demands the inclusion of this voodoo figure in a consideration of McKay's locating of the diaspora in the port space. As "master of that elusive, mystical barrier that separates that divine world from the profane" Legba's duality is reflected in a contemporary sphere in McKay's accommodation of homosocial, and at times, homoerotic interaction in the port which, in the context of 1920s middle class standards, treads a fine line between what is acceptable and perceived profanity (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 6). Legba's omnipotence in the divine and real worlds takes on heightened social relevance in McKay's figuring of the diaspora. His men re-enact this binary, seen when they live temporarily in Marseilles, but never actually belong to a bounded world of constancy, much like Césaire's repetitious use in the *Cahier* of the image of

"Au bout du petit matin" ("brink of dawn"; 72; Rosello and Pritchard 73) to stress the ambivalent social status of the Martinican native. McKay's vagabonds and indeed Césaire's narrator concurrently inhabit two worlds, one of stasis and one of flux. As Chambers proposes,

> To come from elsewhere, from 'there' and not 'here', and hence to be simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside' the situation at hand, is to live at the intersections of histories and memories, experiencing both their preliminary dispersal and their subsequent translation into new, more extensive arrangements along emerging routes. (6)

McKay's unconscious allusion to the figure of Legba profoundly impacts upon the atmosphere of transience and liminality, but one inflected with a specifically African past, thus intensifying the diasporic community alliance.

In the same way that Legba could speak all languages, McKay's vagabonds transcend the limits imposed by a lack of a common language, successfully communicating through music, which draws on their common African heritage. So densely woven is the Yoruban spirit world with the Marseilles of the 1920s that McKay weaves the wealth of African narrativity into his Black Atlantic novel.[40] Seen in this light, his seafarers comprise a contemporary version of enforced diaspora. They explore the possibilities available to them in the liminal space which, in Marseilles, facilitates their sexual explorations, and reflects Legba's marginal

[40] Legba also is affected by the results of African displacement, and undergoes metamorphoses of identity in different loci, not unlike the seafarers and vagabonds of *Banjo* who embrace the flexible personae demanded in the port. Gates outlines the various identities possessed by Legba internationally, and in this transnational re-identification, Legba is in sympathy with the international African diaspora. Legba is known as Exu in Brazil, Echu-Elegua in Cuba, Papa Legba in Haiti and Papa La Bas in the United States (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 5).

virility: “Legba’s sexuality is a sign of liminality, but also of the penetration of thresholds, the exchange between discursive spaces” (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 27).

The nexus between the liminal and the sexual in the figure of Legba is pivotal to a consideration of the seafaring vagabonds created by the bisexual McKay. Legba “is figured as paired male and female . . . or as one bisexual figure” (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 28-9). The connection elucidated here between peripheral zones and bi-sexual normativity is illustrated in *Banjo,* as McKay unconsciously connects his own bisexuality to the Yoruban deity, thus exerting his authorial presence once more in the semi-autobiographical novel. As proposed in Chapter One, McKay accepted his own bisexuality, but its symbiosis of personal ideology, narrativity, fiction and mythology lends a new pertinence to *Banjo’s* exploration of male bonding in the seafaring novel. A resonance emerges between the African poem and *Banjo*’*s* diasporic assembly as they balance on the borders of the past, present and future:

> Swift footed one!
>
> Agile and restless one!
>
> One who scatters himself abroad
>
> One who, once scattered, cannot be put together again (qtd. in Gates 30)[41]

[41] Gates takes this verse from the PhD thesis of Ayodele Ogundipe: “Esu-Elegbara, The Yoruba God of Chance and Uncertainty: A Study in Yoruba Mythology.”

The movement and fissure with the past which characterises Legba translates to the diasporic collective in Marseilles. This notion of 'scattering' oneself away from the place of origin is a recurring effect of migrancy and exile which, in McKay's figuring of transatlantic movement, acts as a stimulant for transnational unification. The individual cannot be 'put together again' but the dynamics of collective affiliation in *Banjo* actively cultivates a group who, as individuals, have experienced isolation, and who also transcend heteronormativity, a central aspect of Legba's persona. The fragmentation brought about by dispersal and migration in the Caribbean context is reiterated in Césaire's poetic rendering of the ambivalent effects of dislocation and reunification:

> mais alors embrassé
>
> comme un champ de justes filaos
>
> le soir
>
> nos multicolores puretés
>
> et lie, lie-moi sans remords
>
> . . . . . .
>
> lie, lie-moi, franternité âpre (134)
>
> but then embrace
>
> like a field of wise filaos
>
> in the evening
>
> our multicoloured purities

and bind me, bind me without remorse

. . . . . .

bind me, bind me, bitter brotherhood (Rosello and Pritchard 135)

There is a reluctance to extol the trope of 'homecoming' in both McKay and Césaire's work, as the Caribbean represents a problematic point of departure for both men. Ray's awkward vagabondage is identified by Goosey in *Banjo* as his purposeful evasion of acknowledging his Caribbean origins. The criticism attributed to Ray reflects that which has been directed at Césaire by the Créolistes:

> Because you're a man without a country, you have no race feeling, no race pride. You can't go back to Haiti. You feel there's no place for you in Africa. . . . You hate America and you despise Europe. You're just a lost sore head. You pretend you'd like to be a vagabond like Malty and Banjo here, but you know you're a liar and the truth is not in you. (191)

Although Haiti has historically represented the independent ideal of the Caribbean, its poverty and American occupation meant a bleak future for any returning migrants. This absolute denial of a valid Antillean culture is contradictory to McKay's contribution to the Négritude movement, both in his actual Jamaican identity, but also in his imaginative return to Jamaica in his 1933 novel *Banana Bottom,* the final novel in his trilogy of exile. Créolistes Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau believe that Césaire "replaced one illusion with another illusion, exchanging Europe for Africa" to the detriment of any genuine Caribbean literary

tradition, reflecting substantial critical opinion on the motivation of the *Cahier* (qtd. in Miller 326). For Confiant and Chamoiseau, Négritude failed the Caribbean because of its failure to embrace Creole culture as a valid expression of black identity. Césaire's "presbyopia" was criticised by the Créolistes as they reject his bid to understand African Caribbean history in the context of transatlantic trauma (Miller 327). The disparity between Césaire and the Créolistes' philosophies are recuperated by McKay's transnational narrative; a Césairian prioritisation of the African and French past and the Créolistes limited focus on the Caribbean is bridged by McKay's conception of a New World African Caribbean future, which although plagued by problematic issues of return, also looks to a transnational and, a 'reworlded' identity. As Michele Wallace suggests, the diasporan individual can possess a "multiplicity of . . . allegiances" and their identity evolves due to "more than one process, more than one location, perhaps three or four, none of which necessarily connect in a self-evident way" (qtd. in Kaplan, "The Politics of Location" 143). McKay adopts French and North African loci as points from which to consider his and his characters' relationship to an African history and yet he expands the philosophies of Césaire and the Créolistes in pushing at the boundaries of Caribbean or African or French or African American literature. McKay envisages a transnational effort at black diasporic unification which is unbounded, and routed. Doyle's suggestion that "literature not only offers a micro-world of the existential dialectics of transnational history but also claims a part in that history by signalling its own production within that world and engaging readers on a materially interactive ground, initiating the entire process again" describes the function of McKay's narrative (3). In his representation of a 'micro-cosmic' community which is both the subject of the novel and the source of new forms of affiliation, his percipient figuration of the

transnational model resounds. McKay's progressive understanding was inevitably facilitated by his personal experience as a Caribbean exile. Living a peripatetic life of serial exile, McKay's ability objectively to assess his relationship to Africa while living in Europe and North Africa, together with his harsh experience of American society, contribute to his rejection of racial or cultural essentialism. His life may be viewed as an experiment in avoiding essentialism, and his exile reflects a belief in the intercultural and transnational identity of the black diaspora.

It is thus perhaps even more significant, when viewed in these terms, that McKay's next fictional locus is the Caribbean to which he never returned. Publishing the collection of Jamaican short stories *Gingertown* in 1932, and *Banana Bottom* in 1933, McKay performs only imaginatively the return desired by Ray throughout *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo.* While creatively restoring the place of the New World African in modernity, McKay himself fails to return to the origin of departure, and this permanent separation from the idyll of his youth suggests the degree to which restless movement was inscribed on McKay's experience. This is highlighted by his dedication to the literary rendering of that vagabond lifestyle, and the formation of identity through the practice of writing and travelling. As Stanford Freidman suggests: "As an ongoing process and reformation, identity depends centrally upon narrative, whether it is an effect of rootedness or routedness" (*Mappings* 153). Imaginative homecomings are a repeated motif throughout *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, and are conceived of in pastoral and organic imagery, indicative of McKay's movement away from the urban loci of Harlem and Marseilles to the illusory comforts of a life in the Caribbean. Although the urban context enabled transgressive transnational community and indubitably facilitates McKay's working out of his own complex sexuality and social marginality, the shift to the Caribbean underlines

his exile. Indeed, McKay exemplifies Edwards' paradigm of the migrant's constant but receding grasp on an actual homeland. Glissant's later suggestion that "Sameness requires fixed Being, Diversity establishes Becoming . . . Diversity is accepted difference" is epitomised in McKay's novels which anticipate the role migration would play on the postcolonial world and New World African diasporan identity (98). His fictional creation of an island life fully realised is a profound component in *Banana Bottom*, as Bita Plant, McKay's first female protagonist, returns from England to live a rural life in the Caribbean. Through Bita, McKay imaginatively counters the repeated motif of the ineluctable loss of island life which haunts factual accounts of migrancy as late as George Lamming's: "We had come to England to be writers. And now we were about to be anchored at Southampton, we realised that we had no return ticket. . . . There was no going back" (*The Pleasures of Exile* 212). Failing to acknowledge the irreparable fissure with island life until accosted by the reality of England epitomises the trauma of the event: return is most desired at the very moment when it can least be achieved. McKay's enactment of return in *Banana Bottom* problematises his vagabonds' contentment in loci which seem to encourage instability. The closing line of *Banjo* affirms McKay's commitment to a peripatetic life. That affirmation has characteristically homoerotic undertones, as Banjo declares to Ray: "Come on, pardner. Wese got enough between us to beat it a long ways from here" (335).

Committing the vagabonds to an unknown but male-centred future, McKay engages with the idea of the homosocial buddy narrative. But, in his trilogy, this is complicated by the female protagonist in *Banana Bottom.* Banjo and Ray, like Jake and Ray, are unburdened by the strictures and implications for the relationship of what Philippa Gates calls the "biracial buddy narrative" of *Huck Finn* as both Banjo

and Ray share a New World African diasporic experience and identity; the duo depart on more equitable terms than Huck and Jim, suggesting, perhaps, the sustainability of their alliance (115). David Lodge's understanding of the modernist novel as having "no real 'beginning'" and possessing an ending which is "'open' or ambiguous, leaving the reader in doubt as to the final destiny of the characters" raises important issues about the final male departure depicted by McKay (qtd. in Kern 3).

Channelling this very quality of 'doubt' is a recurrent feature of McKay's writing, yet one which productively challenges linear or one dimensional assumptions about McKay's intentions for his characters and the nature of their intimacies. Leslie Fiedler's "Come back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" provides a suggestive contextual analysis of the role of the sea in the literary male partnerships of, among others, Ishmael and Queequeg, and Huck and Jim, indicating how "the immensity of water defines a loneliness that demands love; its strangeness symbolizes the disavowal of the conventional that makes possible all versions of love" (51). On the "ever inviolable sea" the male bond can reject the heteronormative standards of the land, and in the biracial context being discussed by Fiedler, and here adapted to McKay's pairing, "there is a context in which the legend of the sea as escape and solace, the fixated sexuality of boys, the myth of the dark beloved, are one" (51). McKay's decision to leave Banjo and Ray at this point in the trilogy exemplifies, rather than detracts from, the complex sexuality explored in the novels. As McKay's trilogy moves to the rural locus of Banana Bottom in Jamaica, he participates in and expands a 'continuum,' to borrow from Sedgwick, in which the female protagonist may emerge once the vagabonds are literally and metaphorically, at sea together, where 'all versions of love' can exist.

Chapter Three

Banana Bottom (1933)

Chapter Three

Where then is the nigger's

home?

In Paris Brixton Kingston

Rome?

Here?

Or in Heaven?

What crime

his dark

dividing

skin is hiding?

What guilt

now drives him

on?

Will exile never

end? (Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* 77)

Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite's 1967 poem "Postlude/Home" prioritises the diasporic facet of black history and narrative which is key to my understanding of movement in Claude McKay's unconventional trilogy. Synthesising the type of restless exile exhibited by the picaros of McKay's fiction with the allusion to a past of slave trauma, Brathwaite's poem demonstrates the persistence, and the ambiguity, of 'homelessness' which we find in McKay's transnational persona. The quest for community which so plagued McKay in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* finds in *Banana Bottom,* his final novel and the third in this trilogy, a complex and ambivalent resolution. *Banana Bottom's* conventionally realist form initially seems to contradict the picaresque and plot-less structure of both *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* in its affirmation of heteronormative 'stability,' but it is in fact a resolution only achieved vicariously. The actual failure of McKay himself, who is so complexly embedded in the fictions of his exile, to return to the originary locus complicates the reading of the already nebulous security he creates in this final novel. This is further troubled by his inclusion of a female protagonist, Bita Plant, into the third novel in this trilogy, to continue and complete the struggle for home which was thus far undertaken by McKay's homocentric surrogates, Jake, Ray and Banjo.

Brathwaite's poetic delineation of the historic lack of a 'home' or the uncertainty of where that home may be in "Postlude/Home," is a primary concern for McKay, and is manifested in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* in the voluntary and constant migrancy of Jake, Ray and Banjo. Yet McKay's transposing of the seafaring narrative to the liminal port space in *Banjo* results, as we saw in Chapter Two, in the reduction of the attendant slavery memory which invariably impacts upon a reading of black diasporic narratives. This is remedied by Brathwaite, who continues in "Postlude/Home" explicitly to recall the history of slavery underlying an understanding of the black diaspora:

good

earth, God's

earth, with-

out that fixed

locked mem-

ory of love-

less toil,

strength des-

troyed, chained

to the sun

like a snail

to its shell

and the hatred

it dragged

in its trail. (Brathwaite, *The Arrivants* 79)

Brathwaite faces an inherited memory of trauma and violence which McKay—decades before Brathwaite—avoids. McKay's albeit unconscious decision to mute the negative connotations of movement and encounter and concentrate on the cultural potential of displacement adds another dimension to his particular version of a Caribbean trilogy—a trilogy which has heretofore evaded such categorisation. Yet even while recognising the negative implications of the slave trade, Brathwaite conceptualises West Indian cultural models as

> a complex of voices and patterns held together by geography, political force and social interaction. . . . the concept of exclusiveness is ruled out, or at any rate is seen to be operative only when a particular

> culture is static or dead. . . . Each culture becomes definitive not only in itself, but in relation to others on which it impinges. (*Roots* 114-5)

Drawing from this sense of inter-related narratives and cultural motifs, this chapter considers firstly how Brathwaite's poetic trilogy, although written decades after McKay's three fictional works, presents a possible model against which to re-evaluate McKay's three novels as a transnational 'New World Trilogy,' while also recognising the essential differences between their achievements. An awareness of the Caribbean inheritance of displacement and disinheritance and a lived experience of colonialism in the Anglophone Caribbean unites the two authors, while the reality of Brathwaite's actual return to the postcolonial Caribbean creates a tension between their perspectives, further heightened by the different eras in which they were writing.[42] Both McKay and Brathwaite lived the migrancy which is central to their work. Silvio Torres-Saillant reflects upon the resonances and implications of the specifically Caribbean quality of exile:

> Migration can be mental as well as physical. The colonial condition has turned the Antillean man or woman into an existential migrant, an itinerant being, a person who wanders between spaces, between traditions—which sometimes clash, sometimes come into strenuous harmony, but rarely cease to produce some tension. (*Caribbean Poetics* 32)

[42] Brathwaite later (1995) had less confidence in the postcolonial landscape of the Caribbean and the nature or value of postcolonial commentary: "I also resent the notion of 'post-colonial' applied so easily to our neo-colonial condition, its false premises of FIGMENT strategically (re)designed to continue the OLD STORY. One wonders where all these now 'post-colonial' voices were during the period of colonialism" ("A Post-Cautionary" Tale 74).

Torres-Saillant's analysis resonates with the idea of the borderland as discussed in Chapter Two in relation to the marginal and potentially subversive qualities of a Marseilles which also reflects the tensions generated in Mary Louise Pratt's 'contact zones.' This chapter embraces these ambivalent forces consciously to engage in a comparison which strengthens the understanding of McKay's books as a fragile trilogy, based on the structure of movement and encounter which structures Brathwaite's first trilogy. [43]

The Caribbean narrator's voice in Brathwaite's *Masks,* the second section of his New World Trilogy, is witnessing a centuries' earlier collective trans-African migration. In structural and thematic terms, this resonates with McKay's placement of *Banjo* as the second novel in the trilogy to describe a unifying experience of movement and fissure in the black diasporic past. Brathwaite establishes a historical foundation for the re-imagined movement of McKay's vagabond collective, and in Brathwaite's delineation of the movement and patriarchal nature of the migration, he offers a precursor for McKay's homocentric, contemporary twentieth century re-visioning of the black diasporic legacy. The narrator recalls how the African tribes "sang"

> in praise of those who journey
>
> those who find the way

[43] Gilkes, writing in 1986, suggests he was glad that Caribbean "writers and artists have begun to accept the challenge of making positive, innovative use of their cultural ambivalence. In attempting to do this they are also, in fact, challenging the Patriarchal, Old World view of community, of culture and of the creative spirit itself" ("Creative Schizophrenia" 4). McKay, I propose here, was certainly pursuing this goal, and long before this theorising of Caribbean cultural production, McKay conceived of the value of ambiguity to literary output.

those who clear the path

those who go on before us

to prepare the way

. . . . . .

But here in the dark,

we rest:

time to forget

the kings;

time to forget

the gods. (Brathwaite, *The Arrivants* 113)

Not only do African tribal leaders 'prepare the way' for their community as they make the journey across Africa, but Brathwaite's delineation of their struggle also paves the way to a clearer insight into the significance of the journeys undertaken by McKay's men who are distinctly leaderless, and lacking in a desire to lead. They trace the migratory practices of their ancestors and yet experience the same remoteness from the 'gods' and 'kings' of Brathwaite's poetic rendering of an African diasporic history. McKay's trilogy precedes Brathwaite's by some thirty years, in which time Pan-African discourse had evolved and been disseminated, and

so McKay's percipient exploration of New World African diasporic and transnational thought in the late 1920s and early 1930s is all the more remarkable.[44] Lee Jenkins suggests *Masks* is

> formally and thematically the trilogy's pivot. Brathwaite's concern here is with the . . . Afro-Caribbean's quest for psychic and cultural integration, his rights of passage to an African past and his awakening to Caribbean retentions and metamorphoses of African religion and culture. (*The Language of Caribbean Poetry* 100)

There is a sense of transition implied here, as Jenkins delineates the movement at the core of *Masks* which can be employed to understand the structure of McKay's trilogy and permits the application of the term 'trilogy' to McKay's three novels in the light of Brathwaite's trilogy.

Brathwaite's narrator is traversing, philosophically and psychologically, the Atlantic paths of his African fore-fathers, and in doing so implies the central importance of mobility in an African Caribbean understanding of identity. As Gordon Rohlehr asserts:

> Brathwaite's trilogy . . . is about the progress or process of the African 'soul' in the New World. This is seen as a world movement, though Brathwaite is ultimately concerned with the Caribbean aspect of it. . . . It is important to understand that the trilogy is much more concerned with process than with protest; with trial error and inner growth. (27-8)

[44] Brathwaite draws on the very philosophies which McKay is too little credited with stimulating.

If we employ this understanding of the pivotal role of that journey across the Atlantic, and the necessity to reconnect, if only at a remove, with an African past, we can situate McKay's trilogy of migration, exile and diasporic affiliation as a pre-text for Brathwaite's New World trilogy. *Banjo's* Marseilles, with the constant ebb and flow of African, European, Caribbean and American vagabondage, is a parallel for the trans-African migration of *Masks.* Brathwaite's subtitle for *The Arrivants* emphasises the tri-partite structure of the work. McKay's trilogy does not announce itself as such, yet it establishes a model for later postcolonial writers, emphasising as it does the impact of motion across the Black Atlantic, which is located thematically in the second novel of the trilogy.

While suggesting that McKay constructs an early Caribbean literary aesthetic upon which later writers like Lamming, Brathwaite and Selvon can build, with its thematic concentration on exile and the complexities of a mobile identity, and its reworking of pastoral conventions, it is also essential to highlight his problematic early positioning outside received canonical definitions of West Indian writing. As I will discuss, McKay's migrant lifestyle and his decision never to return to the Caribbean positioned him as something of a cultural outsider; indeed, McKay has proved a troubling presence in West Indian literary histories, at the same time that his writing is vital to the literary legacy of the region. Nonetheless, Brathwaite, the architect of a Caribbean literary aesthetic, has in his later writing re-integrated McKay into a common West Indian literary body. This is most explicit in Brathwaite's invocation of McKay in the 2001 edition of his *Ancestors* trilogy, where he literally writes McKay into *Mother Poem* (there is neither mention nor allusion to McKay in the original 1977 version of this volume.) The 2001 version in *Ancestors*, which Brathwaite defines on the title page as "A Reinvention of *Mother*

Poem, Sun Poem, and X/Self," is supplemented by a sequence entitled "Heartbreak Hotel," which 'reinvents' the scope of a Caribbean literary aesthetic. Contemplating the relationship between the written and oral word, Brathwaite includes McKay in a West Indian triumvirate from which he earlier excludes him. Brathwaite gives McKay space on the page and space in a reconfigured canon in 2001, publicly acknowledging his contribution to the Caribbean collective voice: "o claude mckay h a vaughan o nuclear xplosion all/ mighty sparrow singing wings/ o city building houses houses houses w/out homes" (72).

McKay's imaginative return to the Caribbean in *Banana Bottom,* experienced through the rooted return of the allegorically named Bita Plant, mirrors the Caribbean concerns in *Islands,* the finale to Brathwaite's *Arrivants* trilogy. The dichotomy of realised and unrealised return experienced by Brathwaite and McKay endorses a reading of McKay's three novels as a trilogy from which later Caribbean artists could draw inspiration, as it is sensitive to endless exile, not just exile which ends in a direct homecoming. Brathwaite's own return to the Caribbean and McKay's fictionalised rendering of female return in *Banana Bottom* suggests a tension between the two writers of exilic trilogy while also reminding us of the multi-dimensional nature of diasporic Caribbean experience. McKay's trilogy begins with *Home to Harlem* and ends with an imagined return in *Banana Bottom*, thus beginning and ending this cycle with exile; home is not Harlem for the Jamaican McKay, and yet as the first novel in this trilogy, McKay prioritises the elusively complex quality of Edwards' unreachable home. Breiner believes Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* is "full of imminent or deferred beginnings which depend upon 'sea-changes,' transformations of consciousness or perception" (*An Introduction to West Indian Poetry* 201). Conversely, McKay's trilogy delineates deferred endings, as he

depicts the quest of Jake, Ray, Banjo and their vagabond peers who continuously seek the elusive 'home' of their imaginations, and whose search for a stable 'home' represents a quest for resolution, for 'endings' and not beginnings. The unexpected and yet conventional resolution of *Banana Bottom* indicates, perhaps, McKay's desire for closure which might redeem his personal isolation from family and other lasting intimacies, a desire which he realises through the compensatory medium of fiction.

Brathwaite returned from Ghana to the Caribbean in 1962, having worked in Africa from 1955 to 1962 as an Education Officer for the Ministry of Education. He went first to St. Lucia, where he took up a tutoring post in the University of the West Indies. He then transferred to the Mona campus of the U.W.I., Jamaica, where he lectured in history from 1963 to 1965, before departing once more for Britain, to take up a research position in the University of Sussex (Rohlehr 3-4). Brathwaite could, because of this return to the Caribbean, consider new beginnings and more importantly, homecomings. In contrast, McKay's permanent migrancy and alienation from Jamaica contributed to his need to imagine 'an ending'. This is not to suggest that Brathwaite's homecoming was untroubled by contemporary concerns:

> Indeed, the early sections of *Islands* and the portion of *Rights of Passage* which deals with homecoming, both suggest that Brathwaite himself experienced feelings of non-identification and placelessness on his return to the Caribbean. But it is just as clear that he regarded these feelings, as things to be understood, creatively explored, fought against and invested with positive shape. (Rohlehr 18)

As McKay channelled the ambivalences of his lived migration through his fiction, Brathwaite, too, imbues his writing with the confusing interaction of exile and homecoming. Referring to Brathwaite's trilogy, Torres-Saillant proposes:

> For someone who has to contend with an ignominious past of slavery, dehumanization, and dispossession, home is not 'where one starts from' but rather a stage to which one arrives, after one has survived the misery of the earlier stages. The collective title of Brathwaite's trilogy is called, not incidentally, *The Arrivants. (Caribbean Poetics* 103)

Torres-Saillant's theory of the exile arriving at one's home but not departing from it or returning to it is one with which McKay's narrative comports, but also one from which it departs. Starting from a point of fissure and exile in *Home to Harlem*, and progressing to *Banana Bottom's* projection of return, McKay's structure resonates with Brathwaite's movement, but resists the cyclical return enacted, in literature as in life, by the later writer. Yet this need not detract from McKay's trilogy; *Banana Bottom* makes for a curious, even an anomalous conclusion, but it is one which recognises the West Indian lived experience of migration and mobility.[45]

As the final novel in a trilogy of exile, Bita's heterosexual marriage and settlement in Jamaica recalls the traditional closure device of marriage in literature from Shakespeare onward, and yet in terms of the narrative progression of the

[45] Brathwaite suggests in his essay "Sir Galahad and the Islands" that "whether we think it desirable or not, the emigrant has become a significant factor on the literary scene, and is, in fact, a product of our social and cultural circumstances. . . . the desire (even the need) to migrate is at the heart of West Indian sensibility—whether that migration is in fact or by metaphor" (*Roots* 7).

trilogy, it makes for an ambivalent and unsatisfactory ending to the previous examination of vagabondage, diaspora and homosocial affiliation. Ambivalence is also a characteristic of Brathwaite's work:

> We may note, too, how chockful of ambiguities the trilogy is; how mood, tone, and language are in constant flux; and how Brathwaite undertakes to resolve all ambiguities, and to suggest that it is quite natural and normal for one single West Indian to speak all these situations, and contain and harmonize all these paradoxes. (Rohlehr 16-7)

McKay's trilogy, if less harmonized than Brathwaite's, comports with Rohlehr's situating of uncertainty and of plural identities in the Caribbean trilogy.

Reflections on the experience of African displacement and slavery in the Caribbean and the consequent New World diasporan pattern are integral to considerations of McKay's Caribbean novel. Brathwaite's comments here may be applied to the quintessentially Caribbean quality of McKay's quest for return from exile; the dualism of absence and return epitomises the West Indian experience and the tension between opposing elements underlined by Brathwaite is a recurrent motif in this chapter:

> The dichotomy . . . is still there. It is a permanent part of our heritage. It comes, in a way, as an almost physical inheritance from Africa where in nature, drought and lushness, the flower and the desert, lie side by side. It is a spiritual inheritance from slavery and the long story before that of the migrant African moving from the lower Nile across the desert to the Western Ocean only to meet the Portuguese

> and a History that was to mean the middle passage, America, and a rootless sojourn in the New World. (*Roots* 29-30)

It is this rootlessness which drives McKay to locate his final novel in Jamaica, but which, on another level, enhances the transnational quality of his trilogy. He imaginatively enacts the 'impossible return' considered in Chapter Two, and the fact that it is only a fictional return demonstrates the restless sensibility of the diasporan writer who resists comfortable or cyclical resolutions yet creates a New World Trilogy which meets Brathwaite's criteria for West Indian writing:

> The dichotomy expresses itself in the West Indian through a certain psychic tension, an excitability, a definite feeling of having no past, of not really belonging . . . and finds relief in laughter and . . . in movement—dance, cricket, carnival, emigration. This is why, perhaps, the best West Indian stories have been picaresque. (*Roots* 30)

The exploitation of this sense of 'psychic tension' and 'of not really belonging' epitomises the narrative progression of McKay's trilogy, and finds a suitably and paradoxically 'inconclusive conclusion' in his limited return in *Banana Bottom,* which also is a departure from the picaresque narrative. McKay's own failure to return to Jamaica endows his trilogy with a palpably exilic dimension which allows him to transcend the boundaries of narrative linearity and to subvert the expectations of trilogy. That it performs the return imaginatively only accentuates the New World diasporic quality of his trilogy.

Glissant proposes that exile is a defining quality of Caribbean life. It is not

> insignificant that the first cry of Caribbean negritude was for Return. The truth is that exile is within us from the outset, and is even more corrosive because we have not managed to drive it into the open with our precarious assurances nor have we succeeded all together in dislodging it here. All Caribbean poetry is a witness to this. (153-4)

The craving for 'Return' and the feelings of exile emphasised by Glissant, and described as almost genetically Caribbean, are clearly significant to our understanding of McKay. Yet McKay's exile is voluntary, selective and prolonged, and while his desire for return may have been genuine, it was enacted only imaginatively and through the female protagonist of *Banana Bottom,* Bita Plant. McKay could have returned to the Jamaica of his childhood, the Edenic paradise so often evoked by the migrant author, and his choice to stay away in body, but to return in mind is a problematic which is troubled even more by McKay's habitation in Morocco at the time of *Banana Bottom's* composition.[46] Brathwaite has suggested that had he not returned to the Caribbean but written of it in a state of extended exile, he would have produced inauthentic work: "I do not think I could have written another book set in the West Indies without coming back to live among my people again" *(Roots* 33). Torres-Saillant expresses a similar sentiment: "When one writes as an 'Emigrant' one becomes divorced from one's natural literary habitat

[46] In a letter in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in Yale in the Claude McKay Collection, dated May 23rd 1933, U'Theo, McKay's older brother wrote to him to inform him of their father's death a month previous, and to ask him repeatedly when was McKay planning on returning to Jamaica. Interesting also is U'Theo's comment to McKay in earlier correspondence, dated March 1st 1929, that "I hope that one of your books will deal with Jamaican life, although there may not be much money in it."

and suffers the lack of 'that special criticism and appreciation' that only the writer's home public can provide" (*Caribbean Poetics* 95). However, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o comments that

> although the West Indian emigrant novel shows how the West Indian's confrontation with the white world often shocks him into self-awareness as a member of a race group, the mood generated even in hard conditions of exile is not bitter protest but a desire to make contact, to hold a human dialogue across the colour-line. *(Homecoming* 99)

McKay synthesises elements of all three positions, while typically resisting each. His fictionalised Jamaica in *Banana Bottom* was the creation of an exile, and its West Indian protagonist is female. The novel represents a complex attempt at understanding the many facets of his own and his childhood community's identity.

One strand of West Indian criticism has celebrated Brathwaite's aesthetic of authenticity. Both Breiner and Torres-Saillant see his re-integration into Barbadian society on his return from Ghana as key, believing that his poetry only gained identity after he

> completed 'the triangular trade' of his historical origins—that is, the passage from Barbados to England, from England to Ghana, and from Ghana back to the West Indies. His verse developed a definite direction, he affirms, after he acquired a 'sense of belonging' (Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics* 99).

In conceptualising McKay's transnational identity, it is harder to delineate a linear journey with clearly defined beginning and end points. McKay chose to depict 'his society' while living in a proxy society, having retraced many routes of the Black Atlantic. McKay's physical absence from the culture of his youth intensifies the exilic nature of his narrative, but also proves that absence may be a productive perspective from which to render that Caribbean society of his memory. This experience of displacement is, in particular, an apt position from which to create the realist novel with its conventional dénouement because it prompts the reader to reconsider the clash between the exilic circumstances of the author, and the conventional novel of community and matrimony he produced. Had McKay been located in the Caribbean, the relevance of the folk community as context for a 'homecoming' narrative would seem inevitable; writing this novel of homecoming from a significant distance, in Africa, renders it another diasporic novel, dramatising the tragedy and complexity of imagined return for the New World exile. This comports with Torres-Saillant's assertion that "Africa provides not a home to which one returns but rather a source from which one draws understanding in order better to grasp the meaning of one's life in the Caribbean setting" (*Caribbean Poetics* 103). Expanding on this, it is clear that McKay understands more than the meaning of his life within the Caribbean context, but conceptualises a transnational identity which is alert to migration and a heritage of displacement.

McKay wrote *Banana Bottom* while living in Morocco, where he found a folk community which so closely resembled that of his Jamaican childhood that the creation of this novel in a surrogate society indicates the authenticity of his Caribbean novel as a New World African cultural product. McKay unites an African with a New World African heritage, psychologically traversing the Black Atlantic

and transposing the African community onto the remembered world of his Jamaican childhood. Louis James comments that we witness, in *Banana Bottom,* "villages whose Africa-centred culture was lovingly evoked" *(Caribbean Literature in English* 46). McKay intensifies, not weakens, the representation of the Jamaican rural world by writing from Africa. Supporting his transnational perspective, and undermining Brathwaite's early doubts about his credibility, McKay depicts a Caribbean society which celebrates its intercultural and African identity: "Marrakesh moved me. It was like a big West Indian picnic, with flags waving and a multitude of barefoot black children dancing to the flourish of drum, fiddle and fife" (McKay, *ALWFH* 304). Wayne F. Cooper writes:

> He had recently turned forty and had begun to feel the need to sink roots in an environment and among people with whom he felt at ease. Although he had no compelling desire to return to Jamaica itself, he recognized among the people of Morocco a basic community existence, rooted in the folk tradition, similar in some respects to the kind of environment he had known as a boy. 'I need to settle down,' he informed Eastman, 'and no place has satisfied me since I left home as much as Morocco. There are many things in the life of the natives, their customs and superstitions, reminiscent of Jamaica.' *(Claude McKay* 271)

This evocation of folk culture is a central concern in this chapter, as McKay imbricates colonial and folk tensions to intensify the complicated parent and child relationship between Bita and her missionary foster-mother, Mrs. Priscilla Craig.

Yet McKay's 'return' is to Africa, not Jamaica, and so he is again caught up in the duality remarked on by Brathwaite; returning to an ancestral home he is

inevitably influenced by the diasporic experience of absence from Jamaica.[47] Produced under such paradoxical and complex conditions, *Banana Bottom* is a fitting finale to McKay's New World trilogy: its conventionally realist content seeks to reflect a diasporic and fluctuating environment. Cooper writes: "In Tangier, McKay successfully completed the transition from purely picaresque fiction to a more psychologically satisfying depiction of black life rooted in the community of his youth" *(Claude McKay* 271). He synthesises his Jamaican childhood which, Louis James suggests, was enriched by peasant "story-telling and popular beliefs," which "instilled a sense of continuity with the African past," with his diasporic adulthood and an ancestral and culturally inherited sense of African displacement to depict the reality of the exile of the 1920s and 1930s, thus again pre-empting Brathwaite's historical trilogy of New World migration *(Caribbean Literature in English* 49). As Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe propose, "The idea of capturing environment and experience from childhood right through to maturity is for the West Indian writer almost like a re-living of a West Indian experience, a savouring of its essential character" (*A Readers Guide to Westindian and Black British Literature* 38). Jamaica was "gone forever yet always accessible in imagination" (Cooper, *Claude McKay* 11).

Writing about McKay's rural stories, Robert Bone suggests that they exemplify

> a poetic vision, an expression of an inner need. McKay's Jamaican pastoral . . . with its images of racial harmony and social peace, is an

[47] Cooper described the history of McKay's family as "the story of transplanted Africans forced to cultivate an alien soil. They survived to claim it as their own. Their history became Claude McKay's most basic legacy" (*Claude McKay* 1). Cooper also delineates the Madagascan and Ashanti origins of McKay's parents (*Claude McKay* 3-4).

> objective correlative of the inner harmony that he so desperately seeks. Split and shredded by his contact with the Western world, he returns in his imagination to Jamaica in order to reconstitute his soul. (qtd. in Cooper, *Claude McKay* 272)

The restorative power of the island locus is emphasised by Bone. If we consider the relationship between diasporan experience and the structural concerns of the trilogy, Bone's comments work to endorse the unity of McKay's three novels. Leaving aside the picaresque, McKay's imaginative return performs an ideological or philosophical return, while his lived reality in Africa emphasises the complexity of the trilogy in a Caribbean context: "With the creation of *Banana Bottom*, McKay's picaresque search for psychic unity and stability, begun with *Home to Harlem*, came full circle to rest again in the lost paradise of his pastoral childhood" (Cooper, *Claude McKay* 282). Yet, detracting from Cooper's resolution, is the reality of McKay's actual unfulfilled return. He didn't come 'full circle,' yet this is the key to his New World Trilogy. A West Indian trilogy which delineates the migration, diasporic affiliation and imaginary but unsuccessful return which epitomises the Caribbean experience of exile and return endows McKay's trilogy with a credibility which would have been diminished had he completed the return to the Caribbean origin, and not to Africa, the ancestral origin.

Yet to merely inscribe 'African' ancestry onto the New World African diaspora is to overlook the various conceptualisations of Africa, which, suggests Breiner, culminate in West Indian writers' visions of a "traditional society in the remote past" which ranges from the Ghanaian Africa implied by C.L.R. James, to the Ethiopian Africa of the Ras Tafarian movement (Breiner 156-7). There is a consensus that Africa has escaped modernity and the machinations of civilisation, hence its

representation in Anglo-American modernism, and in the Caribbean imagination, as the "refreshing image of a world successfully organized along very different lines" (Breiner 157). However, McKay distances himself from these dominant theories of a restorative Africa and reverses the trajectory of nostalgia; the 'mythical' West Indies functions for McKay on an allegorical level while he is in Africa, as the world he depicts in Jamaica is the world of his childhood, untouched by modernity. McKay's autobiographical *My Green Hills of Jamaica* has a profound influence on his conceptualisation of the imaginary Banana Bottom. Barbara Griffin describes the books as the "textual complement" to one another, as many elements of *Banana Bottom* are embedded in his autobiography ("The Road to Psychic Unity" 500). The Jamaican landscape of his memory is also a colonial one, and this impacts on McKay's reluctance to return to the island. Later writers like Brathwaite could embrace the ideology of postcolonial politics. McKay was writing from a colonised perspective. He evokes a world which maintains the community organisation referred to by Breiner as that of the African village: "In our village we were poor enough but very proud peasants. We had plenty to eat. We had enough to wear, a roof against the rain, and beautiful spreading trees to protect us from the sun" (Morris, *My Green Hills of Jamaica* 3-4).

In *Banana Bottom,* McKay interlards the cultural practices of the Moroccan reality he was living with his memories of Jamaica. The interweaving of the two loci, and the group orientation of both cultures, is a factor McKay understood to be lacking in the black diaspora of the 1920s and 1930s: "But there is little group spirit among Negroes. . . . the greatest hindrance to the growth of a group soul is the wrong idea held about segregation" (McKay, *ALWFH* 350). In his essay "Timehri" which appeared first in *Savacou* 2, the journal of the Caribbean Artists' Movement, in

1970, Brathwaite recalls his evolving sense of the importance of group life while he lived in Ghana. Echoing McKay's reflections on the importance of group life in *A Long Way From Home,* Brathwaite writes: "during the eight years that I lived there, I was coming to an awareness and understanding of community, of cultural wholeness, of the place of the individual within the tribe, in society" ("Timehri" 33). Explicitly connecting the African and New World loci, he alludes to the Black Atlantic diaspora which McKay had represented in *Banjo:*

> I came to connect my history with theirs, the bridge of my mind now linking Atlantic and ancestor, homeland and heartland. When I turned to leave, I was no longer a lonely individual talent; there was something wider, more subtle, more tentative: the self without ego, without I, without arrogance. And I came home to find that I had not really left. That it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean. ("Timehri" 33)

This unification of Africa and the Caribbean suggests Brathwaite's understanding of the connectivity of the culture and traditions of both loci, and his merging of the two echoes McKay's earlier subtle interweaving of Africa into the structure of his trilogy.

In both *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo,* McKay delineates the collective experiences of the male diaspora, and concentrates solely on the homosocial bonds forged in a mobile, urban black society. *Banana Bottom* too focuses on group life, yet it is set in the fictional rural locus of Banana Bottom, and is also distinctly heteronormative in its orientation. These opposing contexts can also be identified, suggests Cooper, in McKay's short stories in *Gingertown*. "Mattie and her Sweetman" and "The Strange Burial of Sue" both

> demonstrate the difference between McKay's treatment of urban Harlem and rural Jamaican life. In the Harlem stories, McKay's characters are far from their rural origins and isolated from one another in an essentially cold, abrasive, urban environment. . . . The characters in his Jamaican stories, on the other hand, are usually more at ease with one another and with their environment. (Cooper, *The Passion* 156-7)

Banana Bottom traces the female protagonist's turbulent reintegration into the community of her birth. The symbolic function of Bita Plant's name is oft cited, aligned as it with fertility and rootedness. My focus, however, is McKay's gendered portrayal of migration, exile and return, and the consequent complexity of a female proxy in the final instalment of his trilogy. Considering again the colonial experience of McKay's youth, it is crucial that we resist viewing Bita as a symbolic nationalist muse; Bita comes too early in Jamaican narrative history to function in such a role; her 'rooted' femininity is ambiguous, and the desire to locate her allegorically is countered by the temporal inaccuracy of such an alliance. Yet this facilitates an alternative understanding of Bita's role: she is positioned so pointedly in McKay's imaginative return, and so accommodates a reading of *Banana Bottom* as McKay's problematic resolution of his own complex sexuality and identity. The symbiosis which Bita comes to represent of the male and female dimensions of McKay's identity should not simply be taken as a resolution of McKay's bisexuality. Griffin suggests a more strategic 'use' of Bita:

> Through the female protagonist he could recover his paternalistic past without running the risk of self revelation or sociopolitical censure, and, by locating his story in a remote 19th-century setting and framing

> questions within the limited 'female realm,' he could raise the issue of cultural duality without compromising the colonial bonds familiar to his boyhood. ("The Road to Psychic Unity" 500)

The notion of McKay shielding himself from scrutiny by creating fictional versions of himself has been considered in Chapters One and Two. In *Banana Bottom*, the use of the marriage device problematises a reading of Bita as a mere shield. The question arises as to whether McKay intentionally engages with the picaresque to explore the homoerotic, and the realist novel to extol the heterosocial sphere. In Chapter One I noted McKay's unwillingness to engage with the marriage metaphors so embedded in the travel writing of Hakluyt and in settler conceptions of America; this is indicative of his reluctance to bind the homosocial and the matrimonial in the diasporic community, and yet in his native Jamaica, he integrates such heteronormative unions, thus reclaiming the very land of his nostalgia in a complex gesture of stereotypical and potentially problematic 'rootedness.'

Bita Plant returns to the town of Jubilee after seven years of education in Britain; her return to Jamaica and to her home is significant for myriad reasons. Concluding *Banjo* with the buddy motif of perpetual male migrancy and companionship, McKay begins his third novel with the celebration of female return and settlement. The sense of finality of Bita's homecoming is interwoven with a complexly gendered understanding of return, and a suggestion of the tense colonial relations which problematise the novel:

> Bita had had some seven years of polite upbringing. And she had never had any contact with her home and her own folk during those years. And now she was a real young lady wearing a long princess gown and her hair fixed up in style. (1)

The separation from the community is implied to have resulted in her personal improvement, but also to have distanced her from her island peers, who are hostile to her appearance of assumed superiority: "With Belle Black, the first soprano leading them, the Colored Choristers were in no way intimidated by Bita's years of higher and foreign culture. Indeed they were united on testing it" (1-2). The division between Bita and the island women is wholly derived from her experience of life in the 'mother country,' as was the intention; Priscilla Craig's desire was to erase all signifiers of island life from Bita following the young girl's rape:

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

Exile, for Bita, is designed to eradicate cultural habits and traditions. A gendered experience of exile is delineated in the novel, and so we must explore the problematic of Bita's proto-nationalist symbolism in tandem with her role as McKay's fictional proxy.

The female nationalist muse, embedded in the soil and providing spiritual sustenance to the patriot, is a tempting but erroneous way of reading Bita, situated as she is at the turn of the century in Jamaica[48]. Breiner discusses W.A. Robert's employment of the 'woman and nation' binary in the late 1940s, as woman "is

[48] Barbara Griffin reads the rape of Bita as a "socio-cultural 'initiation'" which "also compels her to become the novel's colonized consciousness—the principal ambivalent psyche" ("The Psychic Road to Unity" 501). The 'ambivalent psyche' perhaps, but Bita is inaccurately conceived as an emblem of the conquered and colonised, or conversely as the emblem of emergent nationalism, embedded as she is in the nostalgic milieu of the transnational McKay's 'psyche.'

proffered as a national emblem"; however convenient it may be to consider Bita as the emblematic "Woman," creating and confining herself to the domestic sphere, this is an inappropriate way in which to understand McKay's decision to replace the Haitian Ray, his fictional surrogate in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, with the Jamaican Bita in *Banana Bottom* (150). McKay attempts, albeit with imperfect results, to reconcile the dual energies of his complex sexuality and to synthesise his debates about his sexuality in the broader context of the trilogy through the employment of a female protagonist. *Banana Bottom* is semi-autobiographical, and as discussed in Chapter Two, autobiography is employed frequently by the oppressed or the marginalised to write themselves, or facets of themselves, into existence. Jean Rhys, an author whose work comports better with that of McKay than that of many later writers, explicitly imbricated the genres of fiction and autobiography:

> I can't make things up, I can't invent. I have no imagination. I can't invent character. I don't think I know what character is. I just write about what happened. Not that my books are entirely my life—but almost. (Rhys qtd. in Plante 52)

As Torres-Saillant suggests, there is a preference by female, and I would add, sexually or racially marginalised minorities, to adopt an "autobiographical mode" which "corresponds to their privileging the realm of the private, which often comes accompanied by a confessional tone, showing thus a search for alternative strategies of expression at the level of both content and form" (*Caribbean Poetics* 73). McKay chooses to explore the 'realm of the private' in the medium of the realist novel, thus safely submerging his autobiographical ambivalence about his sexuality within the

context of heteronormativity, thus again shielding himself from scrutiny as he also does, as we have seen, in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*.[49]

Bita sees in Jamaica an opportunity to live where "there's air to breathe and space for movement" within a stable community context (44). Conflicting with this sense of personal liberation, however, is Bita's cognisance of the limited freedom available to her within the missionary context of the Craig's home in the nearby town of Jubilee, and she aligns the atmosphere of the mission with the exilic British education of her adolescence: "She wondered, now that she had come home to it after all the years of training, if she would be able to adjust herself to the life of the mission" (45). Exile has changed her, but she nonetheless has significant doubts about her place on the margins of her birth community in the very locus in which she has been educated to live, the mission house:

> Everybody among the natives, from her father down, thought it was a magnificent and unique chance for her to have been adopted and given a high-class education and come back to the Jubilee Mission practically the heiress of the Craigs. But she was full of doubt about the future. Would she be able to stand that spiritual atmosphere—go through with what was expected of her and finally reap the material reward? (46-7)

[49] Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman suggests of James Baldwin's later overt efforts to extol a homosocial racialised normativity in *Giovanni's Room* that it was he who

> realized and persistently claimed that the African American, the woman, and the (so-called) sexual deviant are doomed symbols of the US cultural imagination, where the fears, fetishes, and fantasies of the straight, white, bourgeois mainstream are deposited, and that the key to all human redemption is to recognize in these figures their own innate and complicated humanity—and to let them live. (477)

The ‘material reward’ is the inheritance of a substantial dowry from the personal wealth of Mrs. Craig if Bita marries Herald Newton Day, a trainee minister and a suitor chosen by the Craigs for his suitability to the future vision of the mission. Bita’s acceptance of her arranged marriage operates on a number of levels, positioned as it is as the ultimate and desired heteronormative outcome of her exile. Priscilla Craig believes: “He is nice and I am glad you think he is. No doubt he will succeed us here some day when we retire—or die. If that is the will of God. Deacon Day is always talking about you two together” (36-7). Bita’s anxieties, however, are multiple, as the marriage that is to be imposed upon her represents a stultification of her identity so that she simply becomes a part of the mission plan:

> Would she like him enough to marry him? And would she be able to live with satisfaction the life of the mission? There was no doubt Mrs. Craig had her own rigid ideas about the correct things that she should do. Would she be able to live up to them? (47) [50]

Yet it is not Bita who evades the union, but the seemingly enthusiastic Herald Newton Day, who, in his single-minded determination to marry the woman he

[50] Abdur-Rahman suggests of James Baldwin that “the experience of exile, of living as a stranger in an unfamiliar country, powerfully parallels—and analogizes—the social alienation and psychic fragmentation that African Americans and/as sexual outsiders experience at home in the United States” (478). Excepting the emphasis on the U.S. and the later time frame being considered in Abdur-Rahman’s analysis, the marginalisation delineated in Baldwin’s experience maps onto Bita’s; returning from England where she was the ultimate stranger in the land of her coloniser, Bita returns to the Caribbean context as initially, a sexual outsider. Her arranged marriage excludes any of her desire, and suitably reflects the marginalisation she experienced in England. McKay however offers a remedy to this estrangement in her subsequent union, so organically described, with Jubban, who represents the ultimate in Caribbean and native culture.

believes has "been trained like a pure-minded white lady" (100), fails to recognise her lack of interest in the proposed engagement:

> It will be fine for you and me, Miss Bita. You know I wasn't thinking of Jubilee without you. For we were both trained to think of Jubilee—I might as well just say it—for the two of us together. I don't know if you feel about it as much as I do. If it will appeal to you as much as it does to me. But I know my father will be very happy. And Mrs. Craig too. Everybody would be happy if we both got married. (99)

Societal expectations play a role in this union, and yet Herald's eagerness is countered by Bita's resignation to the marriage: "I suppose we might as well do it and please everybody" (99). Bizarrely, however, it is Herald's unexpected actions which cause the annulment of their engagement, and McKay deliberately highlights the unsuitability of this forced and symbolic union by placing Herald in an irreversibly immoral position: "Herald Newton Day had descended from the dizzy heights of holiness to the very bottom of the beast. The rumour ran through the region that Herald Newton had suddenly turned crazy and defiled himself with a nanny goat" (175). Such uncharacteristic and aberrant behaviour perhaps functions to highlight the flight of the unconscious from societal pressure. Herald's actions are unprecedented and singularly memorable, thus prohibiting all future interactions with Jubilee or Banana Bottom for him. McKay implicitly denounces this attempted forced marriage, and in representing Herald in bestial terms, he underlines the unnatural nature of a union grounded in neither attraction nor intimacy.[51]

[51] Gordon Rohlehr conducts a discussion on the symbolism of the goat in African and West Indian culture, and reflects upon Brathwaite's incorporation of the goat into *Masks.* Rohlehr suggests that "As a Caribbean man," Brathwaite (and by extension, I suggest, McKay) "would be perfectly aware

Simultaneously, McKay undermines the heteronormativity which seems to be an integral component of the realist novel; there is friction between elements of McKay's plot and the realist form which contains it.

To return to Bita's complex role as female protagonist in pre-nationalist Jamaica, her struggles with her own physical appearance and ethnicity easily map onto nationalist paradigms, and again the novel toys with our revisionist preconceptions, as it is in colonial Jamaica. McKay contradicts the later theory of Torres-Saillant, who claims that

> women's banishment from the realm of the public, namely the conceptual construction of the nation and the circulation of the nationalist discourse, may lurk behind the frequent recourse that women writers have to the exploration of private spheres and familial arenas. (*Caribbean Poetics* 72-3)

Such a motif cannot be identified in McKay's construction of the role of the female in *Banana Bottom;* Bita is perhaps deployed to the third novel for reasons other than to allegorically pursue a nationalist agenda. She is instead symbolic of the attempted resolution of McKay's troubles with his own identity; standing naked before a mirror, Bita is confronted with the reality of her body, not that prescribed by the mission, not the wife or the potential mother:

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that in the West Indies the goat symbolises masculinity and fertility, though there, these qualities are generally divorced from any ethic of responsibility. . . . Note, for example, the extreme popularity of the calypsonian Sparrow's 'The Village Ram,' where the goat functions as a symbol of phallic potency, durability and insatiability" (122). Herald Newton Day's sexual repression aggressively reasserts itself in his literal but symbolic bestiality, as he reclaims a masculinity denied him by his strict religious education. That Rohlehr explores the African resonances of the goat in Brathwaite's writing, is indicative further of McKay's earlier linking of African and New World histories.

> She undressed and looked at her body in the long mirror of the old-fashioned wardrobe. She caressed her breasts like maturing pomegranates, her skin firm and smooth like the sheath of a blossoming banana, her luxuriant hair, close-curling like thick fibrous roots, gazed at her own warm-brown eyes, the infallible indicators of real human beauty. . . . And no sneer, no sarcasm, no banal ridicule of a ridiculous world could destroy her confidence and pride in herself and make her feel ashamed of that fine body that was the temple of her high spirit. For she knew that she was a worthy human being. She knew that she was beautiful. (266)

The organic imagery used to describe Bita's body imbues her with fertile and specifically 'planted' meanings, and yet her role as McKay's proxy forces us to reassess this rendering of Bita's confrontation with her own image. McKay's arrival in America was, as we have seen in Chapter One, a time of brutal exposure to racism, troubling especially because of the lack of racial organisation of society in his Jamaican childhood. That he permits Bita to experience this personal acceptance of the specific attributes of blackness is paradoxically indicative of McKay's own sense of marginality and racially rooted inner conflicts.[52] Having left Jamaica, he would remain sensitive to his sense of difference, whether it was emphasised by the boorish racism of the American North, or his sense of inclusion in the diasporic locus of Morocco:

[52] Merle Hodge depicts a negative version of the encounter with the self; the young Trinidadian protagonist, Tee, fatalistically craves invisibility: "I wanted to shrink, to disappear. . . . I felt that the very sight of me was an affront to common decency. I wished that my body could shrivel up and fall away, that I could step out new and acceptable" (*Crick Crack, Monkey,* 107).

> For the first time in my life I felt myself singularly free of color-consciousness. I experienced a feeling that must be akin to the physical well-being of a dumb animal among kindred animals, who lives instinctively and by sensations only, without thinking. (McKay, *ALWFH* 300)

The projection of this freedom onto Bita is not incidental, as submerged in this North African environment of affinity, McKay is released of the shadow of 'colour-consciousness'; what is more complex still is McKay's decision to endow his only major female protagonist with this same sense of liberation from racial concerns. Through Bita, McKay channels his bisexuality and his ethnicity, and produces the most fully developed character of the trilogy.

Reflecting McKay's perception of the colonised individual's experience within the greater colonial cultural identity, H.A. Vaughan's "Revelation" provides a parallel with Bita's personal epiphany:

> Turn sideways now and let them see
> What loveliness escapes the schools,
> Then turn again, and smile, and be
> The perfect answer to those fools
> Who always prate of Greece and Rome,
> 'The face that launched a thousand ships,'
> And such like things, but keep tight lips
> For burnished beauty nearer home. (1-8)

Written in the 1940s, Vaughan's appeal for cultural pride is a later enactment of McKay's clarion call for personal and racial affirmation, which, when read retrospectively, constitutes a broader commentary on Caribbean life. The islanders of

Banana Bottom "laughed at the idea of greatness" in Crazy Bow, the native musician who raped Bita (8). They believed "Greatness could not exist in the backwoods. Nor anywhere in the colony. To them and to all the islanders greatness was a foreign thing" (8).

The temptation to extract nationalist messages from McKay's writing should be resisted, and throughout this thesis the emphasis has been on McKay's rendering of a transnational philosophy. Anticipating a postcolonial era, he provides a blueprint for the later writers of the island nations, and yet his focus is always semi-autobiographical, rather than overtly political. Rather than expanding this analysis of the lack of self-esteem in the islanders to comment on the complex colonial interactions in the Caribbean archipelago, McKay focuses the narrative on the experiences of Bita who identifies her place in a stable community:[53]

> She thought how the finest qualities of mind or brain or heart were the attributes of only the rarest spirit, who may spring like flowers in the commonest as much as the most exclusive places, in the proud domain as well as the peasant's lot and even in hothouses. (266)

She is invariably rooted to the island, and the binding of Bita to the earth lends a gendered understanding of exile, return and settlement, which is endorsed by her father: "She had grown out of that soil, his own soil, and had gone abroad for

[53] Griffin suggests the reduction of the narrative to the experiences of its female protagonist and her conflict with Mrs. Craig is to "evade(s) the broader issues of cultural values" ("The Road to Psychic Unity" 504). Against this is my assertion that Bita and Priscilla have enormously allegorical roles which resonate with the distinctly Caribbean and colonial context in which the novel is located.

polishing. Her choosing of her own will to return there filled him with pride; so strong was his affection for the land" (234).[54]

Yet the tensions in *Banana Bottom* stem from the increasingly fraught relationship between Bita and Mrs. Craig, arguably emblems for the emergent conflict between the folk culture and missionary exertions of colonial ideology, which mirrors the underlying autobiographical tensions of the relationship between McKay and Walter Jekyll. An educated English expatriate, Jekyll fostered McKay as a young writer and certainly influenced his poetic creativity.[55] *Banana Bottom's* Squire Gensir is a thinly-disguised Jekyll; McKay admits in a prefatory author's note to *Banana Bottom:* "This story belongs to the Jamaican period of the early nineteen

[54] The bind between the female body and the land is a trope discussed in Chapter One, and yet Evelyn O Callaghan extrapolates on the problematic issue of the figuration of the Americas as feminine and so, conquerable by the dominant male power. O Callaghan charts the historic literary rendering of this dualism: "The tropics as woman's body, a bountiful source of sustenance and pleasure, and the construction of the encounter between Old World and New in terms of male conquest of seductive 'virgin territory,' may have had its origin in Walter Ralegh's account of his 1595 'Discoveries of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana.' . . . it was a familiar trope by 1669 when John Donne's 'Elegie: To His Mistress Going to Bed' compared the exploration of his lover's female body with that of the Conquistadors' forays into the new continent" (92).

[55] McKay recalls meeting Jekyll for the first time "Soon after my mother died" (Morris, *My Green Hills* 65). The bond established between both men evolved quickly and intensely, unsurprisingly considering McKay's loss of his adored mother who also encouraged his artistic proclivities more so than his father ever did. North refers the reader to "several commentators" who "have noticed McKay tended to replicate his relationship with Jekyll, first with Frank Harris, and then with Max Eastman and Joel Spingarn in America, and with C.K. Ogden in England" (102-3). The bond registered between Jekyll and McKay is a blueprint for his later interactions with the white mentors and publishers with whom he worked, but is complicated in its resonances with the maternal bond for which McKay grieved.

hundreds, and all the characters, as in my previous novels, are imaginary, excepting perhaps Squire Gensir." Gensir is, like Jekyll, immediately and always associated with written texts. Bab, Bita's half brother

> found a good friend and mentor in an English man who lived near Banana Bottom. A man who knew a great deal more than he, for he had lived and read more, travelled through the world, and was a sceptic about every form of human society and all the solid-seeming nineteenth-century values. This man had a good library to which Bab had access. (54)

Gensir is occupied with preserving the orality of the peasantry in a static form:

> The peasants were his hobby. . . . He ate their food and sat with them upon their barbecues on moonlight nights, listening to their Anancy stories. Now he was engaged in writing down their songs, jammas, shey-sheys and breakdowns. . . . Any new turn of speech, any original manner of turning English to fit peasants ways of thinking and speaking, could make him as happy as a child. (71)

In 1912, while under the guidance of Gensir, McKay's dialect poem, "Peasants' Ways o' Thinkin'" appeared. The narrator extols the benefits of oral rather than written communication for the dispersal of information pertaining to the injustices of peasant life on the island. Addressing a male collective from the rural community, the narrator defines speech as singularly suitable for the relaying of this message:

> I sort a be'n dah wan' fe try
> To put i' in prose cut an'dry,
> But a'ter all a caan' to worse
> Dan dish i' up in rhyming' verse. (5-8)

The narrator contests the written word for its failure faithfully to delineate the reality of peasant life: "An' things 'bout us in pen an' ink/ Don't show de sort o' way we think" (75-6). The irony of the confinement of this radical voice to poetry is apparent and raises issues of ambiguity and authenticity. However, McKay's poem also impacts on a reading of Jekyll's recording of the oral culture of the peasantry.[56] Compared frequently with similar projects of preservation in the American South, North suggests that in the case of those and Jekyll's endeavours, and by extension, Gensir's,

> the conservative bias of the very act of preservation, which was underscored by the antimodern romanticism they brought to collecting, ran against the rebellious content of the Anancy/Brer Rabbit stories to produce a very equivocal combination. It was this equivocation, more than anything, that Jekyll bequeathed to Claude McKay. (101)

It is possible to identify the gulf in genuine understanding between Jekyll and the community whose culture he claimed to know, as there is, as McKay's dialect poem implies, more to folk culture than the vocalisation of it in dialect; there are inevitably signifiers and implications for culture contained in the actual linguistic imparting of, in this instance, jammas, shey-sheys and work songs.

Jekyll encouraged the then eighteen-year-old McKay to write in Jamaican dialect, branding his dialect verse "the real thing" and criticising the "repetitious" nature of

[56] Gilkes comments: "The European oral tradition . . . was eventually almost superceded by a later, scribal tradition. This was not the case with the African oral tradition, however, and the pull between a scribal and folk art in the West Indies has to be seen in the light of a later European scribal culture attempting to control a more powerful, deeply-rooted and diverse non-scribal one" ("Creative Schizophrenia" 10).

his Standard English verse poetry (Morris, *My Green Hills* 66). The nexus between cultivating the Jamaican land and cultivating the Jamaican language is apparent, and McKay introduces it into the narrative of *Banana Bottom*, where he deals directly with the issue of foreign instructors trying, and failing, to understand the particulars of the Caribbean agricultural process:

> sometimes even trained instructors had to learn from the ignorant instinctive man. For the culture of the soil was so like the culture of humanity, varying according to country and climate. Simple and complex. Obvious and subtle. Easy and difficult. (275)[57]

Jekyll's desire was that McKay should attend Booker T.'s Tuskegee Institute in the U.S and return with the necessary agronomical skills to improve the soil and survive from the land. However, not unlike Priscilla Craig's conception of education and its effect on Bita, Jekyll, for all his liberalism and radical politics, believed that McKay

[57] Rupert and Maureen Lewis indict McKay for his use of language in the sections of *Banana Bottom* which deal with agriculture. They suggest: "McKay sometimes slips into digression, as when, in the novel, he discusses farming problems. The authorial voice which dominates these sections speaks in accomplished English and in well-modulated phrase lengths. . . . These formal patches and the accompanying semantic archaisms ('depended' – 'hung') reveal McKay's educational background as a British West Indian reared on the 19th century English prose masters, through their novels and essays and through the Royal Primers" ("Claude McKay's Jamaica" 46). To read McKay so simplistically is to perhaps miss the ironies and implications of what I suggest are very conscious uses of various registers and linguistic modes. To elucidate the lack of understanding about the agriculture of Jamaica on the part of the outside voice of the non-Caribbean native, serves to implicate the unsuitability of Standard English in the rural locus, and McKay does this quite intentionally, I propose. It is employed by McKay, not in deference to the 'prose masters' of his youth, but in an ironic gesture towards the various modes of understanding the island: in the language of the coloniser and the colonised.

needed to go to abroad in order to learn how to live in Jamaica, learning to live not just as a peasant farmer, but as a poet peasant farmer. As mentioned in Chapter One, McKay recalls that Jekyll encouraged him to go to the U.S. to gain an education in agriculture, thus ensuring he remained "close to the peasantry and their aspirations and ways of thinking" (Morris, *My Green Hills* 82).

McKay elucidates the impossibility and paradox of trying to understand the codes and traditions of the island according to the processes and language of the outsider, and in his early dialect poetry he highlights the fundamentally incompatible worldview of the native and the coloniser—a theme he would develop in *Banana Bottom*. In "Quashie to Buccra" McKay emphasises a lack of understanding of the reality of island life on the part of the colonising onlooker, as appearances imply a false ease:

> De fiel' pretty? It couldn't less 'an dat,
> We wuk de bes', an' den de lan' is fat;
> We dig de row dem eben in a line,
> An' keep it clean-den so it mus' look fine. (21-4)

Undoubtedly here we witness "a larger warning against the aestheticization of hard work" (North 107). The instructor in *Banana Bottom* similarly fails to understand the necessity of certain work practices suitable only to the island context, and in seeking to impose a foreign understanding of agriculture and labour on the Jamaican landscape, only further distances the colonial authority from the colonised. The instructor

> admonished a peasant with a bundle of young cocoa plants which the peasant had rooted up without ceremony from the soil for transplanting. The instructor told the peasant that such carelessly

> handled plants would not thrive. . . . a year later when the instructor again visited the district, they were developing into sturdy cocoa trees. (274-5)

The lesson of this scene concerns the survival and strength of the displaced African and his resilience in the New World, and yet McKay again embeds the cultural and the transnational dimension of Caribbean history in the rural peasantry, where orality and 'Nation language' prevail.[58]

Glissant has considered the function of the land in Caribbean narrative, and he suggests it operates on a defensive level:

> The relationship with the land, one that is even more threatened because the community is alienated from the land, becomes so fundamental in this discourse that landscape in the work stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as a full character. (105)

In *Banana Bottom* McKay endows the land with characteristics reflective of the type of community established there, and at odds with Glissant's suggestion, he describes a community attached to and subsisting from the land:

> there were many church Free Church people at the market, some selling eggs and cakes and buns; others cocoanut drop, banana fritters, ginger nut, and pindar cakes and suchlike titbits that they had fixed up out of the raw stuff the country people had brought down and were selling back to them. (40)

[58] North adds another layer of meaning to the divisions in "Quashie to Buccra:" "What seems at first to be a fairly limited retort against a white tourist, gazing over a hedge and admiring the neat field beyond, is in fact a defensive gesture against the sort of interest a white reader might take in a book like *Songs of Jamaica,* and against the white editor who encourages stereotypical misconceptions" (107).

Jubilee, where the Craigs live, is less fertile and naturally abundant than Banana Bottom, where there is an emphasis on the richness of the native flora and fauna which thrive there, amongst the rural peasantry:

> A difference in water supply and land formation had given the Jubilee district a red colour remarkably dissimilar to that of the Banana Bottom country. The Banana Bottom land with its heavy growth of thicket was a fat slate colour with bubbling springs and rivers abundant and a heavy rainfall which imparted a luxuriant green and a rich ripeness to the staples: bananas, breadfruit, pears, coffee, cocoa and sugar cane. . . . But in the Jubilee district there were no streams. . . . It was no good for banana, cocoa, breadfruit and other fat-soil plants. (184-5)

The dichotomy of Banana Bottom's abundance and Jubilee's austerity (which reflects the aridity of the mission house) is indicative of the supportive role the land plays in *Banana Bottom*, but also is suggestive of a problematic interconnectivity of pastoralism and antipastoralism in the novel.

No urban centre is depicted in *Banana Bottom*, no metropole with which to favourably or otherwise compare the rural locus. Jubilee emerges in a representative if bland urban role, although it reflects some of the negative conceptions of the alienating cityscape of modernist constructions. There, Bita experiences defamiliarisation and a struggle with her identity. Her sense of self is fragmented in Jubilee, and she converts this modernist trope into actual destruction as she takes action to destroy the evidence of her former self:

> She became contemptuous of everything—the plan of her education and the way of existence at the mission, and her eye wandering to the

> photograph of her English college over her bed, she suddenly took and ripped it from its frame, tore the thing up and trampled the pieces under her feet. (212)

Jamaica Kincaid delineates a similar sense of personal fragmentation in *Annie John*, another Caribbean text which prioritises the migratory experience of the female protagonist. Prior to her departure from Antigua to Barbados and Britain, and so inverting the homecoming motif of *Banana Bottom,* Annie John felt "that someone was tearing me up into little pieces and soon I would be able to see all the little pieces as they floated out into nothing in the deep blue sea. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry" (144). Yet in the context of McKay's novel, in Jubilee we envisage an essentially rural space, with only limited authority, which exists in unsatisfactory urban opposition to the rural Banana Bottom. McKay avoids any concrete engagement with the urban space in *Banana Bottom.* The celebration of the countryside's natural fecundity is not balanced by a comparative assessment of an undesirable city space. As Jenkins suggests of his dialect poems "A Midnight Woman to the Bobby" and "Whe Fe Do," there is a reticence unequivocally to celebrate a rural space which demands physical labour and a lifetime of commitment to the soil:

> The nature of the relationship between country and city in McKay's dialect poetry is complex. . . . McKay's antipastoralism is in evidence throughout *Songs of Jamaica,* where the countryside is seen as anything but an Edenic alternative to and refuge from the depredations of the city. (*The Language of Caribbean Poetry* 25)

Without a specified city space, Jubilee becomes the symbolic centre, but one which is impotent, in its marginal status as an outpost of colonial administrative authority.

Bita moves from Jubilee in order to reclaim an authentic Caribbean identity in Banana Bottom, and in doing so inverts the type of experience suggested by McKay's 1912 dialect poem, "Pay-Day," where the individual's moral and ideological downfall results from the move out of rural naiveté into urban experience:

> Once she roamed de country woods
> Wid a free an' stainless soul,
> But she left for Kingston's slums,
> Gave herself up to de wul':
> She has trod de downward course,
> Never haltin' on de way; (49-56)

McKay retraces the gendered move back to the originary countryside in *Banana Bottom,* and conversely allows Bita the social amelioration denied the prostitute in "Pay Day:" "The transition from innocence to experience and from trust to betrayal is, in these poems, attributed to the transition from country to city" (Jenkins, *The Language of Caribbean Poetry* 22). In *Banana Bottom,* we do not witness a simple ascription of pastoral and organic contentment to Bita; prior to her journey back to Banana Bottom, she has already returned to Jamaica from Britain, the colonising metropolis, and her arrival in the rural town of Jubilee resulted only in dissatisfaction and conflict. Her return cannot be understood as McKay's one-dimensional engagement with nostalgic pastoralism because Bita's first experience of return to the island is wrought with personal and philosophical betrayal of the sort located in the city space in Jenkins' analysis of McKay's dialect poetry. In his depiction of the rural townscape of Jubilee as a site of transition for Bita, between urban England and rural Banana Bottom, McKay reduces the possibility of a simple pastoral reclamation

of island identity. Typically ambiguous, her move back to the place of her childhood and her organically conceived marriage to the earthy Jubban suggests an easy pastoral vision; her difficulties in the liminal and rural/urban Jubilee query such a conclusion and indicate an anti-pastoral perspective.[59]

However McKay integrates the Banana Bottom landscape into the theme of the realist novel in such a way that he avoids overt environmental expression; he personifies islanders' resilience covertly, through the very language used to distinguish identity. Lamming highlights the necessary and symbolic role of the land in the Caribbean novel: "For soil is a large part of what the West Indian novel has brought back to reading; lumps of earth: unrefined, perhaps, but good, warm and fertile" (Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* 46). When Bita encounters Marse Arthur, a local overseer, the separation of peasant and imperialist identity elucidated by and in language is stark and has immediate resonances with the landscape:

> His brittle voice was so unpleasant to her and his small-town dialect so different from the peasants' way of speech; their brief concise phrases, words dark and yielding as the soil and green as the grass wet with dew, pliant as supple-jacks and juicy as mangoes, sifted and moulded to give expression to simple Negro tongue. (262)

McKay has often been criticised for his use of Standard English in the verse he published after leaving Jamaica. North suggests that in McKay's poetry, and specifically in "The Tropics in New York"

[59] Jenkins suggest: "One of Claude McKay's major contributions to the literature of West Indian exile, and to the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, is his use of the city as point of access to a black—and expatriate—version of pastoral" (*The Language of Caribbean Poetry* 47). McKay characteristically challenges literary convention, and re-works it to more suitably convey his own version of exile and creativity.

> the ultimate level of dispossession in this poem, beyond literal hunger and metaphorical nostalgia, is linguistic. . . . In fact, leaving dialect behind while also leaving Jamaica behind led McKay into a linguistic no-man's land from which he never quite emerged. (113)

However, it is significant that McKay endorses Jamaican dialect in *Banana Bottom*, the more so since the novel was written during his expatriation in Morocco. Having shunned dialect as an appropriate medium for poetic production when he left the Caribbean, McKay creates in his rural West Indian novel a community which not only communicates through dialect but which also maintains the group life and folk traditions which are fortified and sustained by the dialect and its use as a vehicle for oral cultural activity. McKay liberates the rural community from Gensir's textual confinement.[60] Endorsing the vital function of dialect in the folk community, he provides that community with a voice to convey its unique and multifaceted culture. Before analysing the orality so central to the novel, it is essential to consider the debate surrounding Caribbean orality and written texts. As Gilkes suggests: "The oral, mimetic tradition of the West Indies derives, in fact, from a very wide, universal source: a heterogeneous pool of folk experience and tradition" ("Creative Schizophrenia" 10).

[60] McKay's relationship with Jamaican dialect and his connections with Jekyll are complex; while using dialect in *Banana Bottom* as a mode of making audible the submerged voice of the colonised, it is also important to consider that the use of dialect was something encouraged by Gensir in the early dialect poetry of McKay: *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*, both published in 1912, the same year McKay left Jamaica. In his fiction, paradoxically, and with the fictionalised Gensir, McKay actually returns to the language of his early poetry *through* his fiction. The language of Standard English which characterised his extra-Caribbean poetry is muted, ironically, in his novel of the Caribbean, and no less in his Harlem and Marseilles novels.

Brathwaite refers to the linguistic submergence of primarily oral folk cultures which occurred when African rituals and traditions were forcibly driven 'underground' in the New World. With the arrival in the Caribbean of Yoruba, Ashanti and Congolese people (prompted by the slave trade), Brathwaite writes: "We had the arrival in our area of a new language structure. It consisted of many languages but basically they had a common semantic and stylistic form" (*History of the Voice* 7). The symbolic and actual silencing of the African and of African culture in favour of the imperial languages resulted in the creation of a multifaceted linguistic pattern which, by virtue of its submergence, proved a key tool of resistance in the slave community, enabling it to mark its presence in a paradoxically vocal way; the language of the slave "was moving from a purely African form to a form which was African but which was adapted to the new environment and adapted to the cultural imperative of the European languages" (*History of the Voice* 7).

McKay's use of language in his poetry is controversial. In *Banana Bottom,* however, there is a correlation between the liberation of the submerged rural society in the narrative and the increased use of dialect as the novel progresses. Brathwaite connects the survival of African orality with an emergent West Indian literature which incorporates a folk inheritance:

> The African presence in Caribbean literature cannot be fully or easily perceived until we redefine the term 'literature' to include the nonscribal material of the folk/oral tradition, which . . . turns out . . . to have been relevant to the majority of our people. (*Roots* 204)

If we apply this to *Banana Bottom,* we can identify the novel's attempt linguistically to circumvent the colonial education received by both Bita and McKay. McKay's integration into the narrative of folk language and speech, and his thematic use of the

conflict between colonial and folk interests, suggests his engagement with the historical linguistic struggles of the island and his awareness of the gulf between colonial and Caribbean island culture. Belle Black, the lead chorister of Banana Bottom, is unfaltering in her faithfulness to her own island identity and expresses the core tensions in dialect: "'I got to follow mi feelings them, honey,' said Belle. 'I sings in the choir all right, but I'd rather not to sing than no gwine a tea-meetings and dances. Ain't nobody loosing and tying mi petticoat string them but meself when I get ready" (76). McKay's novel represents Caribbean literary evolution and its cultural uniqueness in the content and theme of the narrative but also through the language in which it is expressed. Arguably, his poetry represents his mastery of the imperial literature and is critically conceptualised as a resistant literature in itself by Jenkins, yet his use of folk language and his attention to folk traditions in prose suggests a bolder recovery of the pre-colonial landscape, and a desire to restore to prominence the African heritage which he was experiencing in reality in Morocco, thus typifying the transnational dimension of his work. McKay's linguistic choices signify a philosophical awareness of the transnational implications of the imbrication of language and culture. As Glissant proposes:

> the Creole language appears to be organically linked to the cross-cultural phenomenon worldwide. It is literally the result of contact between different cultures and did not pre-exist this contact. It is not a language of a single origin, it is a cross cultural language. (127)

Glissant alludes, too, to the supremacy of orality over written literature, and warns against the overwhelming impact of writing on a primarily oral society: "I am not far from believing that the written is the universalizing influence of Sameness, whereas the oral would be the organized manifestation of Diversity" (100). The

threatening nature of writing must be countered by an oral counter-discourse which aims to give expression to diversity and is perhaps more amenable to cultural evolution that the fixity of the written word. Glissant proposes: "the writer could increasingly perform the function of an archive and that writing would be reserved as an esoteric and magical art for a few" (101). As always, McKay's fiction resists easy alignment with Caribbean theorists' paradigms; indeed, it could be argued that McKay challenges the exclusive nature of the written word, since he privileges dialogue in *Banana Bottom.*[61] In doing so, he commits to a multiplicity of voices and experiences, which although caught in the world of the written narrative are also evidence of an engagement with the vital oral tradition of the island, seen most vividly in the tea-meetings which are the central social events for the rural community and which are spurned by the mission: "Tea-meetings were the principal indigenous amusements of the peasantry. . . . And tea-meetings were classed as vulgar amusements and bad company and denounced from the pulpit" (56). The mild debauchery of the meetings is the occasion of the most memorable passages of dialect in *Banana Bottom*, designedly so; the language and the event are as significant to an understanding of folk identity:

> Here right under you' unwordy beholding eyeballs is the crown for the glory a Kojo Jeems' tea-meeting, the most injuicing temptation of the feelings that human hands can fasten togedder to water you

[61] There is a marked tension between the theories of the Francophone Caribbean as proposed by Glissant, so 'rooted' in the Caribbean context, and McKay's mobile and distinctly transnational understanding of identities. Glissant's theories were more applicable to Chapter Two's analysis of *Banjo,* indicating the problematic issue of positioning McKay in specifically Caribbean paradigmatic constructions.

> moutses an' ticklish you' eating injun. Here the most wannerful crown in the jewels of Banana Bottom. (78)

Glissant addresses indirectly one of the effects of McKay's inclusion of dialect in *Banana Bottom*: "For the only way . . . of maintaining a place for writing . . . to remove it from being an esoteric practice or a banal reserve of information—would be to nourish it with the oral" (101).

It is with this same nourishment—linguistic, oral and centred on the folk tradition of Jamaica—that *Banana Bottom* is 'fed.' There is a pre-visioning here of Brathwaite's 'Nation Language,' a tool very often used to 'beat' the verse forms of McKay's poetry, but the West Indian vernacular is a prevalent feature of the trilogy and is especially pertinent to *Banana Bottom.* Brathwaite endorses an understanding of Nation Language which is focused on verbal communication and speech:

> I think . . . language does really have a role to play here, certainly in the Caribbean. But it is an English which is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealistic experience and sensibility, which is now . . . influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people. (*History of the Voice* 13)

The boundaries of this concept extend to include audible expressions which are also non-verbal, which are musical or religious and reflections of identity.[62] Brathwaite believes the function of the West Indian novel was to "liberate the consciousness of

[62] Brathwaite writes that Nation Language is "an oral tradition, the poetry, the culture itself, exists not in a dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word. It is based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning, and if you ignore the noise (or what you would think of as noise, shall I say) then you lose part of the meaning" (*History of the Voice* 17).

the submerged folk" and to demonstrate how "the speech of the folk-dialect has played a crucial part not only on the surface but within the very structure of the West Indian novel" (*Roots* 117). McKay sought to "liberate" the "submerged folk" not just in his novels, but also in the earlier context of his dialect poetry. In his 1911 version of "Sukee River" there is channelled, suggests Jenkins, "the redemptive power of the rural," signified by "the shift in linguistic register from standard to vernacular enacting at a semantic and sonic level the retrieval of authentic self hood that the content of the poem describes" (*The Language of Caribbean Poetry* 23). McKay begins the poem with a promise to the river which flows through his native Clarendon: "I shall love you ever/Dearest Sukee River," (1-2) and ends the poem swearing (falsely) his allegiance to the river and the rural space in vernacular language. This reflects the bind between self and space and the employment of dialect, or 'Nation Language' to represent the interaction between the native and the Caribbean:

> I'll ne'er roam from you again
> To a life o' so-so pain,
> Crystal flowin' river,
> Dearer now dan ever (75-8)

The village events in Banana Bottom are advertised primarily by the drummer, Kojo Jeems, and it is this symbolic and clamorous orality which both frames the novel and binds the community together. Jeems' use of the drum is comparable to its role in Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*—to beat the rhythm of black diasporic experience:

> God is dumb

until the drum

speaks.

The drum

is dumb

until the gong-gong leads

it. Man made,

the gong-gong's

iron eyes

of music

walk us through the humble

dead to meet

the dumb

blind drum

where Odomankoma speaks: (Brathwaite, *The Arrivants* 97)

Brathwaite notes that the focus of this transplanted African culture was religious, but that Christian missionaries actively fought to eradicate all traces of African faiths: "Slowly the ex-slaves began to lose or disown the most crucial elements of their culture . . . They began . . . to go to churches and chapels rather than to beat drums"

(*Roots* 196).[63] *Banana Bottom* restores the primary importance of the folk practice and the prominence of the drum:

> The next day there was the big picnic at Tabletop. . . . The drumming started early, giving the signal that it was picnic day. Kojo Jeems, the drummer, had a fine set of drums, and he was loved for his wonderful rattling of the kettle-drum. His son beat the big drum. They went playing down the hill, followed by a few ragged kiddies, to the hub of the village. There they were joined by the fiddler and the flute-blower and played and played . . . until there was gathered a great crowd. And all marched swaying to the music over the hill, and picking up marchers marking time along the wayside, up to the playground. (63)

Organically the community gravitates toward the drum, which gestures towards both their African cultural practices which are re-imagined in the Caribbean locus and also to their prioritising of the 'folk' above the 'church.' The drum here serves to call, respond, and lead, and is literally and metaphorically rooted in the community, drumming the collective heartbeat of group life:

> Under the wild tamarind tree, its vermillion blossoms scattered in the silver-and-brown grass, the musicians made their stand and played the country jigs while the kettle-drum rattled away. And the young folks danced two by two, four by four and in thick groups. (65)

[63] The fissure and duality suggested in Brathwaite's division of church and drum is suggested too by Gilkes' analysis of the inherent binarisms of Caribbean culture: "The experience of slavery and colonisation brought with it a cultural and social uneasiness which still haunts us. That is where *our* ambivalence began: that dichotomy of two 'styles,' two traditions, the opposition of black and white. It is a dualism encouraged by a conquering Christianity" ("Creative Schizophrenia" 3).

The drummer and the band are embedded in the natural habitat of the island, and McKay uses repetition in the narrative not only to imitate the drum beat but also to underline the relevance of the transposed African emblem to the New World context:

> Under the wild tamarind tree around the fiddle and the flute, the big drum booming, the kettle drum rattling, the young village jigged, two by two, four by four or many in a ring . . . the dancers spreading away from the tamarind tree like a flock of frolicking goats. (70)

The drum also operates on an allegorical level, and resonates with Brathwaite's construction of the tensions which emerged between church and drum. In *Banana Bottom,* Mrs. Craig and Bita can be read as the representative symbols of Church and Drum. The significance of the movement outlined by Brathwaite from drums to chapels is a central motif in the evolving dispute between Bita and the mission, and is made literal and even reversed in her movement from Jubilee, the site of the mission, back to Banana Bottom, the home of her father. She performs a version of resistance which the ex-slaves could not maintain post-emancipation in the face of the missionaries' insistent teachings, and so McKay permits Bita to uncover her African 'religion,' and to embrace her folk 'roots,' to which he so pointedly makes metaphorical references throughout the narrative. Bita was the "precious flowering of a great work" (11), having "grown out of that soil" (234) in Jamaica, and "her music, reading, her thinking were the flowers of her intelligence . . . nourished by the . . . soil" (313). Returning to Jubilee, Bita had been configured as the 'product' of Priscilla Craig's creative merging of intellect and education in the 'motherland':

> This day celebrated the sum of joy in the clerical life of the Reverends Malcolm and Priscilla Craig. They were happy in a praise-Godly way over their handiwork. The transplanted African peasant girl that they

> had transformed from a brown wilding into a decorous cultivated young lady. Bita was one flowering of a great work. . . . Tiny beside her well-built husband, the always austere face of Priscilla Craig was flushed with an almost beatific light as she sang, thinking of the work and the result. (11)

Like the oppressed slave who submitted to the Church, and for whom the Church was a symbol equally of oppression and a reminder of all they had had to submerge, Bita is forced into the role of subject: "Mrs. Craig wanted to demonstrate what one such girl might become by careful training . . . by God's help" (17).

It is Bita's further movement into the social life of the peasantry in Banana Bottom which is the signifier of her psychological departure from Jubilee. Attending her first tea-meeting unbeknownst to Mrs. Craig, Bita is exposed to the native past-time which centres on the oral practice of an auction, and is also introduced to Squire Gensir who is curious about her because she

> had been sent to his own country for higher cultivation and that had made her really different with a different charm of refinement of her own. . . . He had thought that with her background, her training, she would be an impossible if not an intolerable person. (81)

Yet it is their debate about the peasantry following the tea-meeting which illustrates the significant duality and ambivalence bred in Bita by her exile and return:

> What freedom have they? Plodding and digging and digging all day. And never going anywhere except to market. And never any fun but tea-meetings. And you—you have the run of the world. Even here, you can go anywhere from the governor's house to the lowest peasant's hut. (121)

Bita's education instilled a mentality which aligns imperialism with domination and freedom, and indigenous identity with a sense of stasis and stultification. Yet Squire Gensir's understanding of island freedom is ironic, situated as he is as a member of the very civilisation which promulgates the psychology imbibed by Bita: "when I speak of the freedom of your peasants, I mean that unconscious freedom in their common existence, their natural instincts. They don't know what repression is" (121). Bita's evolving faculties of introspection allow access to the debate staged internally by Ray, as both figures struggle to balance their 'education' with their black, and diasporic identities. Squire Gensir conceives of Bita's education as the very obstacle which separates her from genuine engagement with her heritage:

> You're intolerant because of your education. Obeah is a part of your folklore, like your Anancy tales and your digging-jammas. And your folklore is the spiritual link between you and your ancestral origin. . . . My mind is richer because I know your folklore. (125)[64]

The paradox of Squire Gensir, a British citizen, finding value in the island oral traditions is suggestive of the ambiguous resolution McKay grants Bita in her unfolding re-integration into the island culture, and there is some irony in the fact of the Squire's 'enrichment' from African and Caribbean cultural products. Rather than serving as the facilitator for Bita's simple acceptance of her native heritage, Gensir's

[64] Austin Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* elucidates a similarly stark commentary on the colonial education: "I knew all about the Kings; the Tudors, Stuarts and Plantagenets; and the Wars of the Roses; but nothing was taught about Barbados. We lived in Barbados, but we studied English society and manners. . . . I was more at ease in England, the Mother Country, than in Barbados. I lived the lives of those men in *The History of England* book" (69).

is the very voice which disturbs a simplistic resolution to the education versus instinct debate which has been a common thread through the trilogy. [65]

Bita's difficulties in balancing her education and her rural inheritance in *Banana Bottom* finds a parallel in Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin,* as the narrator, G's, attendance at the island high school separates him from the other boys of his community: "Whether or not they wanted to they excluded me from their world just as my memory of them and the village excluded me from the world of the high school" (212). Lamming expresses a problematic tension between education and 'instinct,' as if one naturally erases and precludes the other, as McKay does in all three of his novels. Bita's imperfect efforts to merge and yet retain the separate facets of her experience is often read as the attempted resolution of McKay's personal preoccupations, and in Lamming's version, G's alienation is equally equivocal: "I remained in the village, it seemed, on the circumference of two worlds"

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[65] In his *History of the Voice,* Brathwaite describes the phenomenon of school children who

> instead of writing in their 'creole' essays 'the snow was falling on the playing fields of Shropshire (which is what our children literally were writing until a few years ago, below drawings they made of white snow-fields and the corn-haired people who inhabited such a landscape), wrote: 'the snow was falling on the canefields': trying to have both cultures at the same time. (9)

Bita struggles to resolve such an odd binary, and the resolution is less easily accepted when seen in the context of the trilogy rather than in isolation in *Banana Bottom.* It is when we consider this debate about education throughout the three novels that the apparent resolution is undermined; both *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* destabilise the seemingly conventional concerns and dénouement of Banana Bottom. Austin Clarke also delineates a dichotomous island consciousness: "Anne Boleyn, Anne of Cleves, Elizabeth Tudor (one by this name lived in Town), Mary Queen of Scots—all these were women with whom I was in love. I painted their faces black and put their huge crinolined dresses on the girls I saw around me" (*Growing Up Stupid* 69).

(*In the Castle* 212). The 'in-betweenness' articulated by the young G as he occupies the 'borderland' of society, of childhood and adulthood, and of education and the lack of it epitomises the vacillating security felt by Bita on her return to the island and the community of her birth.

Typifying the duality of the colonial education is Lamming's delineation of the particular structures of power exhibited in the island classroom in *In the Castle of My Skin,* as the spectacle of Barbadian children worshipping the Union Jack is fraught with conflicting symbolic and ideological implications. Intensifying Bita's submersion in that same tense and conflicting environment is the fact of her education in Britain, the imperial centre. Lamming's G recalls: "In every corner of the school the tricolour Union Jack flew its message. . . . The children in the lower school looked with wonder. They seemed to see a mystery that was its own revelation" (28-9). As the Barbadian children stand to celebrate the Queen's birthday on the twenty-fourth of May, Lamming emphasises the imbalance in this ceremony, further intensifying an understanding of the significance of Bita's decision no longer to privilege her colonial education: "Three hundred years, more than the memory could hold, Big England had met and held Little England and Little England like a sensible child accepted" (*In the Castle* 29). The monarchy and flag, which are emblematic of their status as colonial subjects, are inescapably held up as icons of domination: "The colours though three in number had by constant repetition produced something vast and terrible, a kind of pressure or presence of which everyone was a part" (*In the Castle of My Skin* 28). Colonial education was dedicated to the creation of loyal subjects, at the expense of their own cultural identity and history, and is challenged in *Banana Bottom* with Bita's personal struggle against the attempt to erase her island cultural inheritance. McKay

expressed a discomfort with the language and identity of the island which was silenced by the British colonial education system. When Jekyll encouraged McKay to shed the language of his schooling, McKay admits:

> I was not very enthusiastic about this . . . because to us who were getting an education in the English schools the Jamaican dialect was considered a vulgar tongue. It was the language of the peasants. All cultivated people spoke English, straight English. (Morris, *My Green Hills of Jamaica* 67)

C.L.R. James articulates the quandary of the English educated West Indian:

> It was only years after that . . . I understood the limitation of the spirit, vision and self-respect which was imposed on us by the fact that our masters, our curriculum, our code of morals, everything began from the basis that Britain was the source of all light and leading, and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn; our criterion of success was to have succeeded in approaching that distant ideal—to attain it was, of course, impossible. (qtd. in Wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming* 97)

The vividly evoked colours of the Union Jack are emphasised by Lamming's focus on its three clashing colours; indeed, the repetition of the number three in the opening pages of *In the Castle of My Skin* suggests the relevance of trilogy and of tripartite structures to the Caribbean literary and oral tradition. Extending the analysis of the three colours of the Union Jack, G continues:

> Miss Foster. My mother. Bob's mother. It seemed they were three pieces in a pattern which remained constant. . . . Here where the fences penetrated each other and in silent collaboration produced a

> corner there were three. Outside where the roads crossed there were more: thirteen, thirty. The three were shuffling episodes and exchanging the confidences which informed their life with meaning. . . . In the broad savannah where the grass lowcropped sang in the singeing heat the pattern had widened. Not three, not thirteen, but thirty. Perhaps three hundred. Men. Women. Children. . . . Three. Thirteen. Thirty. Three hundred. (16-7)

Lamming communicates the child's understanding of how Caribbean life is organised according to a structure of 'threes,' stemming from the triangular nature of island conquest and repopulation and recalling Miller's Oedipal and tripartite analysis of the Caribbean and the Black Atlantic. G conceives of island life and its inhabitants in terms of threes: "The landlord. The overseer. The flood. Miss Foster. Bob's mother, my mother. Not thirteen, but three" (26). The tripartite structure of McKay's novels and the trilogy are echoed in Lamming's semi-autobiographical account of a child's perception of Barbadian existence and social organisation, which he understands as being derived from a triple foundation. Reflecting the child's microcosmic awareness of the politics of the island, G's school is also organised as a tripartite structure, as three corners of the room are decorated with imperial reminders: "In one corner a palm-tree, and in the others three shrines of enlightenment that looked over the wall and across a benighted wooden tenantry" (*In The Castle of My Skin* 27). The intrusion of the coloniser into the education system and the value system promoted on the island is also reflected in Bita's complex encounter with Gensir, who, endeavouring to restore folklore to island attention in a written medium is not as straightforward an influence on Bita's evolving island consciousness as has been suggested.

Bita's reconnection with her ancestral heritage is in fact awkwardly stimulated by the guidance of Gensir, who freely admits to such a role:

> He suspected . . . that he was in a measure morally responsible for her breaking away from Jubilee and that the beginning of it was the night when he encouraged her to let herself go dancing at Kojo-Jeems' tea-meeting. (240)

Resonating with Jekyll's directive to McKay to embrace dialect poetry, Gensir gives himself a formative role and so complicates readings of *Banana Bottom* which offer a one-dimensional account of Bita's reclamation of her past. There is a certain condescension in the Squire's reflections on Bita's ability to sustain her intellectual pastimes in the rural locus:

> He marvelled that Bita was devouring his profoundest books on religions and their origins and scientific treatises—the theory of the universe, the beginning of life, the history of civilizations and the physiology of man and nature, and that she did not merely parrot the ideas she picked up but interpreted them intelligently. (240)

The literature and theology intensifies for Bita the conflicting claims of religion and ancestry.

Yet within the narrative, God and Obi-God are represented as opposing elements of religious activity on the island, intensifying the binary:

> The people worshipped the Christian God-of-Good-and-Evil on Sunday, and in the shadow of night they went to invoke the power of the African God of Evil by the magic of the sorcerer. Obi was resorted to in sickness and feuds, love and elemental disasters. (135)

Obeah is the spiritual possession of the peasantry in the village of Banana Bottom and is a transplanted New World version of the African spirit religions which survived both the middle passage and the silencing delineated by Brathwaite, despite its criminalisation by the imperial authority: "The colonial government had used every means to stamp out Obeah—long terms of imprisonment and the cat—but it flourished as strong as ever and the demand for the sorcerer seemed greater than the supply" (135). Visiting the Obeahman, Wumba, Yoni Legge and her mother, Ma Legge, seek his advice on the issue of their increasing jealousy of Bita. A grotesque scene ensues:

> Wumba, the Obeahman, waited under the cashew tree to receive Yoni and Ma Legge. . . . Enormous rat-bats whirled around him. . . . Two goat-skins were strapped around his loins and from the waist up he was naked except for a hogs' teeth and birds' beak. His hands and forehead were stained with mangrove dye and his hair was an enormous knotty growth (135-6).

Yet McKay, rather than presenting a negative picture of Jamaican folk religion, is emphasising the submerged but resilient nature of folk practices. Reclaiming the narrative from a prioritisation of the mission faith, he embeds a peasant faith at the very core of the novel and in doing so intensifies the polarity between Bita's sense of indigenous affiliation and Mrs. Craig's loyalty to the beliefs of her mission teachings. The church categorically rejects Obeah, not least because of its African resonances, but also to segregate the New World African from the 'old.' The fissure implied in their criticism resounds with imperial rhetoric: "There are no people so addicted to sorcery as we Negroes. The continent we came from is cursed and abandoned of God because of magic. We brought along the curse with us from over

there" (154). Slavery, capitalism, mineral wealth and greed are Africa's curses, yet the official commentary elucidates the aggressive and penetrating influence of the mission and the colonial authority, as it denies the very religion which endured the horrors of the middle passage and provided sustenance to the displaced and tortured: "You can't serve Jesus-God and Obi-God. To do so is blasphemy. You've got to choose between the two" (155). What is under scrutiny is not just religion, but colonial subjugation and oppression; the very notion of the maintenance of ties to the ancestral birthplace is denied, and the African presence on the island is consequently muted. In the colonial mindset, loyalty to a shared African past must be relinquished: "God is long-suffering. But he is a jealous God. He won't stand for your serving him with half a heart and Obi with the other. He is a revengeful God" (156). Characteristically, however, McKay assumes a position 'between the two,' where island traditions are sustained and shielded from complete assimilation into the world represented by 'God' and not Obi-God.

The implications of the missionary denunciation of Obeah are profound, and involve a denial of actual, imaginary or religious reunion with an African past of the kind graphically described by George Lamming in *The Emigrants.* Faced with imminent arrival in Britain, the Caribbean immigrants collectively convey their understanding of the traumatic beginnings of African settlement in the New World, but also the irreversibility of this condition of displacement:

> Englan' an' France an' Spain an' all the great nations make a raid on whoever live in them islands. . . . England, France, Spain, all o' them, them vomit up what them din't want, an' the vomit settle there in the Caribbean Sea. It mix up with the vomit them make Africa vomit, an' the vomit them make India vomit an' China an' nearly every race

> under de sun. An' just as vomit never get back in yuh stomach, these people, most o' them, never get back where them vomit from. (*The Emigrants* 65-6)

This analysis engages with issues of cultural encounter and colonialism as it alludes to the forceful and unstoppable nature of imperial repopulation of the islands, but also to the absolute impossibility of a return to ancestral origins. The analogous function of the act of vomiting is suggestive of the physicality of the experience of displacement but also of the complete break with the 'pre-vomit' era left behind. The 'vomit,' the infectious and the undesirable members of society, were relocated to the Caribbean where their encounter with the abused and displaced African resulted in the creation of a unique society, which in turn gives rise to and supports the formation and dedication to counter-cultural traditions outside the colonial authority.[66] Addressing the unique community of his childhood, McKay writes in 1912 in his dialect poem, "My Native Land, My Home:"

> Jamaica is de nigger's place.
> No mind whe' some declare;
> Although dem call we 'no-land race,'
> I know we home is here. (5-8)

Echoing McKay's poetic rendering of Caribbean cultural dynamics, Brathwaite emphasises how

[66] Julia Kristeva writes of vomit: "Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, muck. . . . Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (2). The expulsion from the empire of its 'food,' 'filth,' 'waste,' or 'dung,' in the act of vomiting situates the Caribbean as the ultimate site of abjection when viewed through Kristeva's construction.

> African culture not only crossed the Atlantic, it crossed, survived, and creatively adapted itself to its new environment. Caribbean culture was therefore not 'pure African' but an adaptation carried out mainly in terms of African tradition. (*Roots* 192)

Complicating the exilic condition, Lamming underlines the lack of desire to reverse the projectile action, and so the return of those fragments of 'vomit' to their place of origin is neither considered nor craved. Yet what is emerging essentially in relation to religious practices in *Banana Bottom* is the re-imagining of African inherited cultures, and the subversive faith in Obi God is indicative of the greater cultural manipulations and reconfiguration which McKay delineates in the narrative; Jamaican religious traditions are transnational and New World re-visions of an African past, and it is on this specifically Caribbean ideology that Bita, an icon of transnationalism and interculturalism, and Priscilla Craig, the bedrock of the mission ideal, clash. Glissant suggests that:

> Caribbeanness, an intellectual dream, lived at the same time in an unconscious way by our peoples, tears us free from the intolerable alternative of the need for nationalism and introduces us to the cross-cultural process that modifies but does not undermine the latter. (139)

This is not so easily implemented in the Jamaica of McKay's creation.

It is in Jamaica that Bita strives to synthesise the two facets of her life experience, and she clashes with Mrs. Craig most passionately when her native inclinations are obstructed. When asked if she will be attending the parish tea-meeting, Bita recognises the limits placed on her by her education and her status in the mission house: "There are some things you are not always free to do even though you may want to. All depends on your position. And my position is such if I went to a tea-

meeting I know Mrs. Craig would be shocked to death" (74). Yet Bita's evolving and rekindled passion for the life from which she was separated intrudes upon her role in the mission house; the exertion of independent thought, an expression of her native inclinations and an engagement with folk culture are the stimulants of conflict between Bita and Mrs. Craig:

> retracing the memorable stages in her growth it came clear to Bita now that although Mrs. Craig had never referred directly to it before . . . there had always been some thing about the woman proclaiming: You are my pet experiment! . . . But perhaps there was no means of the truth about herself being revealed to such an engrained self-confident person as Priscilla Craig. (211)

Bita's response to the island is sensual and instinctive, yet it is tempered by the effects of her education, and it is this dimension of her persona which positions Bita as Ray from *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo's* female replacement in McKay's trilogy:

> Bita mingled in the crowd, responsive to the feeling, the colour, the smell, the swell and press of it. It gave her the sensation of a reservoir of familiar humanity into which she had descended for baptism. . . . And she thought that if she had never gone abroad for a period so long, from which she had become accustomed to viewing her native life in perspective, she might never have had that experience. (40)

Her exile enhances rather than detracts from her appreciation of the island and the reference to baptism alludes to her re-birth amongst 'her' people, cleansed by the orality and sensuality of the market: "Accents and rhythms, movements and colours, nuances that might have passed unnoticed if she had never gone away, were now revealed to her in all their striking detail" (40). It was, she conceives, an instinctive

response: “She could not theorize why she felt that way. It was just a surging free big feeling” (40). The ‘freedom’ she experiences is understood to be that of the freedom of the child: “But the pure joy that Bita felt in the simple life of her girlhood was childlike and almost unconscious” (40). Yet this aligning of Bita’s island persona with that of the child is not unproblematic, and becomes a pivotal tension in the novel as Mrs. Craig continues to try to control Bita, despite her increasing ability to think independently and outside of the parental control of the Craigs. Figuring the West Indies as the ‘child’ in the Oedipal triangle is Christopher L. Miller’s pertinent method of mapping the parent and child dynamic of the colonial interaction, and the rebellion displayed by Bita against her colonial controller could be read as the rebellion of the island against the mother country. But to map Bita onto a nationalist agenda is to misconceive the colonial background from which McKay was writing, albeit that McKay’s influence on the writing of postcolonial West Indian authors is evident here. Bita’s strife can be read as an autobiographical rendering and continuation of the quandary which plagued McKay’s proxy, Ray, as she attempts to support the productive co-existence of her colonial education and the informal island education of her youth.

Lamming’s characters debate the treatment they receive from the British public in *The Emigrants*, and there is a resonance with Bita and Priscilla’s evolving incompatibilities. As Lamming’s characters consider the parent/child dynamic of the colonial interaction, so too does Mrs. Craig conceive of the mission house and the missionaries as beacons of morality and exemplars of piety for the islanders. Squire Gensir highlights the core of the condescension: “she sees you with the eyes of a good Christian—like a little heathen to be brought up in the doctrine of salvation”

(125-6). Priscilla Craig sees herself in a distinctly authoritarian and parental role, and views the islanders as weak children in need of guidance:

> If there was anything that Priscilla Craig and her fellow workers in Christ were agreed on in discussing the qualities of the natives, their faults and their virtues, it was the lack of restraint among them. . . . they seemed to lack that check and control that was supposed to be distinguishing of humanity of a higher and more complex order" (16).

Priscilla's failure to understand the very people she patronises is echoed by Lamming's depiction of the pervasive attitude of the British in England towards the migrants:

> take the English. . . . if they'd just show one sign of friendship, just a little sign of appreciation for people like me an' you who from the time we born . . . we wus hearin' about them, if they could understan' that an' be different, then all the hate you talk 'bout would disappear. . . . Tis almost like w'at children might feel for parents who never treat them right. (*The Emigrants* 191)

The parent/child relationship still dominates the adult West Indian psyche in the postcolonial era, and is a relic of colonialism. In Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* a similar parent/child dichotomy represents colonial interaction, as the narrator comments: "Three hundred years, more than the memory could hold, Big England had held Little England and Little England like a sensible child accepted. . . . Barbados or Little England was the oldest and purest of England's children" (29).

However, we should consider the differing contexts of these fictional constructions of colonialism and its aftermath; in *Banana Bottom,* the Craigs imported their attitude from Britain to the colony, and in that ambivalent space

attempt to stamp their authority and their standards. Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* locates the narrative in the West Indies, and yet in *The Emigrants* we witness the inversion of context, as the colonised West Indian arrives in the land of the coloniser with colonised expectations and feelings of loyalty which the English do not understand:

> They know that England got colonies an' all that . . . but they never seem to understan' that these people in these places got an affection for them that is greater than that of allies in war-time. . . . An' that's why if ever there's any fightin' in our parts o' de world, we'd be nastier to the English than to any one, because we'd be remembering that for generations an generations we'd been offerin' them a love they never even try to return. (*The Emigrants* 192).

G, the young narrator of *In the Castle of My Skin,* articulates a similar if less threatened loyalty: "One day before time changed for eternity, Little England and Big England, God's anointed on earth, might hand-in-hand rule this earth . . . Big England had only to say the word and Little England followed" (*In The Castle of My Skin* 29). The unrequited love suggested here, which is anathema to the unconditional love of the parent/child bond, emphasises the incomprehensible imbalance of the colonial relationship, further underlined by the naïveté of Lamming's G.[67] Emerging from an era of imperfect postcolonialism permits

[67] Griffin indicts McKay for his seemingly simplistic alignment of the men in *Banana Bottom* (Malcolm Craig, Jordan Plant, Jubban) with the 'good' and Priscilla Craig with the intolerant and hostile; she suggests that

> deflecting blame from Malcolm (whose strength and good looks have been noticed by Bita), Bita favourably contrasts him to his wife: He is gentle and understanding while she is biased and unsympathetic. . . . In this way, McKay mitigates the

Lamming to voice this attitude and to place the colonial in the coloniser's land, vying for equality and respect, but also threatening the coloniser. Yet there is a palpable resignation to a future of displacement if the coloniser continues to play a role in the reality of the colonised: "It seem we got to find a place one day, some new land where we can find peace" (*The Emigrants* 195).

Yet McKay's depiction of a rural community which is sheltered from the immediate and daily influence of the coloniser is to a degree an attempt to create this 'new land' and any invasion of the mission into Banana Bottom is prevented. Bita removes herself from Jubilee, mission headquarters, and finds refuge in the locus of her birth and so subverts the later resignations of Lamming's emigrants. McKay promotes the rural and undeniably marginalised community as a singularly appropriate location for Bita to attempt to synthesise the education of her exile with the passion for her birthplace:

> Bita settled down quietly to the rural life of Banana Bottom, helping Aunty Nommy to superintend the household . . . the preparation of cassava . . . practising her music, . . . Bita and Squire Gensir had interesting discussions about the topics of the times. (236)

Bita finds in Banana Bottom an accommodation of the two dimensions of her persona. McKay endows the Jamaican countryside with a tolerance unavailable in the domain of the 'progressive' mission and so continues his privileging of liminal loci for their propensity to support ambivalent and transnational personae.

> consequences of confrontation and preserves the sanctity of the patriarchal image. ("The Road to Psychic Unity" 504)

This generalisation is undermined however, by the many unfavourable representations of 'patriarchy' in the form of Herald Newton Day, Hopping Dick, Marse Arthur, and the undeniably favourable representations of matriarchy throughout *Banana Bottom*.

In The Castle of My Skin also depicts a rural Barbadian childhood and adolescence in the colonial context, and like the characters of *Banana Bottom*, Lamming's islanders subscribe to the notion that imperial greatness is the only greatness, and that it only exists beyond the islanders' world:

> The world of authority existed somewhere along the fringe of the villagers consciousness. . . . The world ended somewhere along the bridge, and beyond was another plane of reality; beyond was the Great, which the landlord and the large brick house on the hill represented. (*In the Castle* 20-1)

That inferiority complex is apparent in the almost identical sentiment in *Banana Bottom* cited earlier*:* "Greatness could not exist in the backwoods. . . . To them and to all the islanders greatness was a foreign thing" (8). Not only is 'greatness' a quality which the rural community believes it lacks, but it is one that belongs solely to the coloniser, reflecting the negative sense of identity resulting from the colonial relationship. The narrator of *In the Castle of My Skin* communicates this sense of inferiority as fear: "The obedient lived in the hope that the Great might not be offended, the uncertain in the fear it might have been" (21). Both novels' highlighting of this dynamic in the coloniser and colonised interaction serves paradoxically to undermine the colonial authority; repeatedly the colonial representative proves itself unworthy of this unquestioned praise. Yet McKay also illuminates the natives' tenaciously maintained ties to their folk culture, the preservation of a counter-culture imbued with dialect, Obeah, tea-meetings and picnics. Rather than depicting victims of oppression, McKay conveys a society living beyond the boundaries of imperial control, with Bita as representative of both transnational and island culture.

Yet as McKay's proxy, Bita finds a certain satisfaction in her ability to determine her fate, to balance her education and intellect and re-establish herself within the framework of the community of her youth. Bita's permanent return to Banana Bottom and her marriage to Jubban, the dray-man on her father's land, is described in organic and holistic imagery: "Her music, her reading, her thinking were the flowers of her intelligence and he the root in the earth upon which she was grafted, both nourished by the same soil" (313). This marriage functions as a 'suitable' ending to a realist novel. Bita finally synthesises her education with her affinity for the soil, and drawing the quandary of the Haitian Ray to a close, her marriage to Jubban functions as a symbolic merger of the problematic of the three novels. However, *Banana Bottom* also functions as the awkward conclusion both to McKay's trilogy and to his own restless and marginal place in the Caribbean literary canon. McKay shirks having to commit Jake, Ray, Banjo and himself to a 'suitable' ending and in his heteronormative conventional conclusion to a trilogy of vagabondage, homoeroticism and exile, he disturbs our expectations of trilogy and what Frank Kermode would call our 'sense of an ending.' To suggest that *Banana Bottom* disrupts the narrative of male mobility and vagabondage is to affirm also the transnationalism at the core of McKay's philosophy, as it actually underlines the lack of boundaries in his writing, and positions him as a percipient explorer of the global trajectory of vision. Torres-Saillant writes:

> In general, practitioners of the poetics of the marginal will enact their subversion by upholding a set of tenets that tend to challenge the assumptions apparent in the Western literary canon. In this sense, Caribbean poetics, seen as the localized occurrence of the counter discourse of cultural marginality, constitutes a discrete, socio-

> historically specific, regional manifestation of the poetics of the marginal. (*Caribbean Poetics* 12-3)

While McKay's poetry comports with this analysis, there is also a parallel with his fiction. As McKay manipulates the trilogy form and subverts expectations with his inconclusive conclusion, he may be seen to 'challenge the assumptions apparent in the Western literary canon.' If his poetry performs a mastery of form and a simultaneous deformation of mastery as delineated by Baker and Jenkins, so too does his fiction forge a 'counter-discourse of cultural marginality' as it asserts a thematically Caribbean conclusion to a transnational trilogy. He demonstrates a resistance in his trilogy to an easy resolution of the three novels. Although *Banana Bottom* deploys an uncharacteristically conventional structure, it is in tension with the narratives preceding it. *Banana Bottom* symbolises a reluctance fully to engage with a canonical structure like that of trilogy, but reflects also in his imaginative return a reclaiming of the marginal character of the Caribbean. McKay repeatedly endows liminal zones with the potential for intercultural encounter, cultural productivity and diasporic affiliation, so his imaginative return to Jamaica indicates both a paradoxical cohesiveness and an assertion of the value of marginality to a counter-hegemonic community.

Brathwaite too speaks to the particular value of Caribbean literature in his critical 1969 review of Louis James' *The Islands in Between: Essays on West Indian Literature*. Brathwaite prescribes a remedy to what he saw as James' tendency to accept European models as the only means to understand island literature:

> There will be no 'one West Indian voice' because there is no 'one West Indian voice.' The West Indian voice is a complex of imposed 'establishment' tongues (Standard English, French, Dutch, etc.) and

> the mainly submerged patterns of 'the folk'—the peasants and illiterates who carry within them a transformed but still very real and essentially non-European tradition of Africa, Asia and the Amerinidians. 'West Indian culture' is the expression of these interacting traditions, making their way out of a broadly ex-African base. ("Caribbean Critics" 7) [68]

Defying limiting gender divisions, McKay's liminal position in relation to the Caribbean literary tradition is comparable to that of Jean Rhys.[69] Mapping McKay's

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[68] More recently, Brathwaite's challenge to both Caribbean critics and critics of the Caribbean has intensified. In his 2000 *Golokwati* he expresses confusion and a sense of exclusion, asking why his peers in the Caribbean are undermining his academic and creative acumen, but also,

> as if this home-comefrontation is not enough, I find myself continually involve w/the great defence of what GL wd call 'our cultural sovereignty' > the incursions of usually English/British liberal/imperialist critics &/or their native clones or cronies. (n.pag)

He advocates an emphasis on projects for cultural production, for a "nativist discourse" and analysis within the Caribbean, supported by "links among & between Caribbean/Caribbeanist writers, artists, critics etc both regionally and along the Diaspora as one way of processing an image of our own aesthetic, our own < cosmology" and thus buffered from those same "English/British liberal/imperialist critics" (n.pag).

[69] Both Rhys and McKay are frequently placed in various canons, and both escape easy categorisation. Reflecting on this quandary, Brathwaite writes:

> to find all these (pedagogic) 'places' for Rhys/WSS (English, West Indian, 'continental [i.e. Eurocontinental], postcolonial, 'eventually . . . fully Caribbean') . . . don't big her up at all, no matter what the ?good intentions; it belittles, fragments and eventually figments her w/the assumption that her 'very particular [Caribbean] locality can't take up it own bed and walk. ("A Post-Cautionary Tale" 78)

This resonates with the transnational quality of McKay's identity proposed in this thesis.

fictions and their ambivalent progression through the trilogy has been facilitated by gendered spatial theories: Rhys' fictions of alterity illuminate the qualities of 'the edge' so central to McKay's alternate reading of the Caribbean. Evelyn O' Callaghan reflects upon the need to understand the ambivalence in Rhys' fiction and her place in a female Caribbean literary tradition, suggesting that it is reflective of a greater Creole cultural problematic which contends not only with the frequently muted voice of woman in Caribbean literature historically, but also with the tensions existent in an understanding of Creole identity:

> narratives by locally born women writers, while participating in colonialist discourse, also express an ambivalence about the culture of the English metropolis, and sometimes turn a unique and critical gaze on this center, reconfiguring to some extent the significance of . . . 'home.' (108)

Feminist responses to Rhys routinely read her alongside modernist contemporaries such as Virginia Woolf and yet it is instructive to understand Rhys in the light of O' Callaghan's analysis: as the inheritor of an ambivalent female Caribbean literary aesthetic. Brathwaite alludes to this when he writes of Rhys:

> As long as we cut Rhys—or any of us—off from the rest of Caribb lit and Caribb lit from the rest of the Caribb society/culture and treat it/her/them as separate, isolated, ?unique, a kind of 'scientific' specimen, we will certainly have only fragment and figment. Above all, can we treat a race-founded and race-foundered society as if it—looking back at its future—didn't xist? the specimen w/out its

environment sticking to its wings its claws? ("A Post-Cautionary Tale" 74)[70]

Discussing female exclusion from Caribbean cultural histories, O'Callaghan renovates a female, albeit often marginalised island voice, which is receptive to the characteristic ambivalences of female experiences within and without the colonial Caribbean. Elaine Savory emphasises the centrality of the Caribbean to an understanding of Rhys' trajectory, as it underlines the essential alienation of her fiction written while in exile, yet there is a suggestive pairing of O' Callaghan and Savory's critical readings of Rhys as both draw focus back to the originary Caribbean context, while also recalling the inherent binarisms of Caribbean writing both at home and abroad. Savory's suggestion that Rhys' characters' marginality comprises a Caribbean subtext or quality deriving from a society familiar with "migration and the experience of living on the edges of a less than welcoming society" recalls the importance of McKay's Caribbean identity, too often diminished in the critical blanket assimilation of his writing into a U.S. American canon deriving from the Harlem Renaissance (76). Savory describes Rhys' lifelong feeling of marginality which, born in her youth, was subsequently fed by a life lived always on

[70] Brathwaite's opinion of Rhys is complicated, however, and he moved from being extremely critical of her voice, to later re-integrating her into a West Indian cultural aesthetic. His ambivalence is apparent here, in 1995: "My position on WSS is that Rhys was honest in her sense of GUILT ref her gilded (Coulibri) plantation environment; but by fragmenting it into creole/metropolitan (Miranda) considerations (reflecting her own xperience, after all) she finally constructed a (beautiful) figment, w/ Christophine/ Sycorax being significantly submerged—income of the culture war(s) which WSS is 'about' What I continue to maintain is that too many nonCalibans* and now 'postcolonialist' critics are trying to shift Rhys' figment and 'guilt' onto Tia and 'me' and I RESENT this" ("A Post-Cautionary Tale" 74). (emphases in original)

the edges of communities, like McKay's.[71] A sensitive social conscience conceived in her childhood led her to distance herself from her white family and its colonising identity, and this resulted in the sense of alterity which remained with Rhys throughout her life:

> I was fair with a pale skin and huge staring eyes of no particular colour. My brothers and sisters all had brown eyes and hair, why was I singled out to be the only fair one, to be called Gwendolen which means 'white' in Welsh I was told? (Rhys, *Smile Please* 20)

Her alienation from both white and black communities reflects an ambivalence which seems to characterise all her relationships, and binds her to McKay in an ironic but suggestive way.

Like McKay, Rhys evades alignment with one uniform or bounded category of identity. Indeed, Savory's insight into Rhys' psychology is comparable to McKay's: "I do not mean to infer that Rhys was frivolous about her views on race, class and nation . . . or double dealing in her protestations. Rather she did play on two teams in every case" (23-4).[72] Rhys' tendency to 'play' on 'two teams' is understandable,

[71] Complicating Rhys' marginality are her vacillating views of the societies from which she felt isolated. She recalled her sympathies for the black population of Dominica which became drastically opposed as an adult: "When I was a little girl I was always saying, 'That's not fair, that's not fair,' and I was known as socialist Gwen. I was on the side of the Negroes, the workers. Now I say, 'It's not fair, it's not fair,' about the other side, because I think they aren't treated fairly" (Rhys qtd. in Plante 50).

[72] A more loaded construction of this division is Fanon's theory of cultural schizophrenia, which Gilkes reminds us, is "the most damaging legacy of colonization" which "gives rise to the nagging sense of personal isolation one finds in the work of so many Caribbean writers. The writer, attempting to deal with this condition, frequently feels himself to be an 'exile,' even within his own society" ("Creative Schizophrenia" 1-2).

since from childhood she had experienced divided loyalties, ancestors, histories and, as a teenager, locations. While McKay's childhood was relatively free of such divisions, it was his experiences of leaving Jamaica, and his encounters as a diasporic migrant which connect him to Rhys. It was the action and condition of emigration which provoked the ambivalences in McKay that he transfers to the characters of his novels with such potency. Savory writes:

> In a period informed by high nationalism and two world wars, Rhys belonged to no single national identity and began to forge a textuality which speaks to that condition most poignantly in the description of Sasha, in *Good Morning Midnight*, as having 'no pride, no name, no face, no country.' (26)

While McKay subverts the negative connotations of this analysis of Rhys's personal and fictionalised displacement, the notion that 'Rhys belonged to no single national identity' highlights an affinity between McKay and Rhys which transcends gender, geography and ethnicity but emerges from a common engagement with the need for imaginative return for the West Indian plural identity.[73]

Antoinette's last action in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* as she flies off the roof in a surreal sequence to join her childhood friend Tia, is, writes Savory, *"*an impossible turning back of time and history, but one which locates her finally in the Caribbean and in nature" (147). There are resonances here of African myths of flying back to Africa; in addition, the scene bears comparison with the theme of *Banana Bottom,* in which McKay enacts similarly imaginative return through Bita which involves an

[73] In discussion with David Plante, Rhys denied feeling 'West Indian' because "it was such a long time ago when I left" (Rhys qtd. in Plante 44). For Rhys, absence intensifies a sense of the loss of nationally ascribed identity.

equally impossible turning back of time in its imaginative nature. Rooting herself in the peasant soil is Bita's positive version of Antoinette's leap to the ground, but both speak to a shared Caribbean aesthetic. Rhys' Antoinette is in exile in body, confined as she is in an attic in England, replicating her mother's displacement and isolation, but her exile is also psychological as she is as tormented by the England of her mind which she always imagined as grey and dull, the opposite of her Caribbean world.[74] Antoinette's return to the Caribbean is as imaginative as McKay's, yet it puts an end to the torment of her life of confinement. McKay's return, vicariously enacted through Bita, protects him from the potential torment of alienation in Jamaica, but it also offsets the loneliness he must have experienced as a lifelong exile. Both authors, although writing from very different viewpoints, explore imaginative female return.

Brathwaite contributes another theoretical lens through which to view Rhys: in 2002, he situates *Wide Sargasso Sea* as containing the "most ++MR closures, certainly in anglopho" (*Magical Realism Vol.2* 583). Antoinette's final leap is not the only episode of magical realism, and Brathwaite elucidates the lack, paradoxically, of typical signifiers of magical realist fiction in the novel. There is

> no evidence of *oumfô* or even approach to it/ the work remain (s) utterly secular/agnostic w/out a single *lwa* that I can recognize—*of Hispanic-Américan MRs*—her black nurse, Christophine, the one possibility, nvr being allowed this growth/recognition, being relegated by the culture paradigm of the writer/ of the anglicanaphillic Caribbean of that period, to the, in this case, negative status of *obeah-*

[74] This recalls also McKay's disillusionment which is visible when we compare the England of his expectations with the London of his experience in his dialect poems, "Old England" written in 1912 (Maxwell, *Complete Poems* 45-6), and "London" (Maxwell, *Complete Poems* 232) written in 1934.

> *woman.* So as I say, there's nvr, in this novel, an approach to *oumfô,* tho, as in Harris . . . the txt itself . . . is *oumfô* & ?therefore, ?miraculously, creates its own redemption and healing. (583)

Wide Sargasso Sea is the magical realist temple in itself, he poses, and yet the importance of this can be better understood when viewed in the light of Brathwaite's 2001 comments. Here, he situates magical realism as an intercultural genre which productively engages with the Caribbean's numerous 'ancestors':

> In other words, there must be a reason, *some* reason, why Franz Roh in 1925 begins giving a ?new name to certain observed phenomen(a) in the 'field' of art and why, sometime in the 60s, a whole 'school' (trend, tendency, BOOM) of mainly Latin writers came to be <perceived as 'of this thing' and why, as we review the subject, we fin(d) ?link antecedent hints of it—perhaps more than hints—ancestry?—in Hieronymus Bosch (c1512) Rabelais (1532) Cervantes Saavedra (1605) < Swift (1726) Sterne (1759), Kafka (1937) Lewis Carroll (1865) Brownin(g) (1864) James Joyce (1922) jazz (1920s) Hindemith (1930s) Marianne Moore (1940s) Bandung (1955). (*Magical Realism Vol.1* 125)

This suggests the possibility of the racially and socially ambivalent Rhys' participation in a reworked Caribbean canon, as it reconceives the merits of intercultural or multiple views, and in doing so actively expands the traditional structures of narrative forms, such as magical realism, which is so often deemed an exclusively Latin American possession. Rhys' implicit exploitation of the lwa and oumfô, the voodoo spirit and the temple, in the very form of her narrative, suggests a particular version of Caribbean modernism also, but one resonant with magical

realist opportunities for multiple cultural signification. Rhys' value can be interpreted as her positioning both inside and outside the Caribbean voice, and in 2002 Brathwaite exploits her plural identity to connect her to a valid and contestatory Caribbean narrative.

As appropriate as Rhys' fiction is as a parallel to McKay's in an understanding of Caribbean alienation, the literary alliance is inevitably complicated by their differing gender, social and racial backgrounds. While they are connected by their shared ambivalences as to identity and their experiences of social and sexual marginalisation, it is a troubling pairing, and as such is representative of McKay's relationship with other Caribbean writers of his own, and later eras. There is friction, for instance, between McKay, a male Jamaican writer of movement, and Glissant, a Martinican theorist whose vision, while global, always returns to the Caribbean:

> Today the French Caribbean individual does not deny the African part of himself; he does not have, in reaction, to go to the extreme of celebrating it exclusively. . . . He is no longer forced to reject strategically the European elements in his composition. . . . He can conceive that synthesis is not a process of bastardization as he used to be told, but a productive activity through which each element is enriched. He has become Caribbean. (8)

While suggesting the type of interculturalism available to McKay in his travels and witnessed in his fictions, Glissant's reduction of it to the Francophone Caribbean reveals the disparity of vision between the two men. The creolization process which Glissant confines to the West Indies and which produces a specifically 'Caribbean' identity is expanded beyond the archipelago by McKay, who embraces the New

World diaspora to claim a transnational and mobile identity, 'unrooted' but intercultural and international.

The 'productive activity' referred to by Glissant echoes McKay's (and later Gilroy's) re-imagining of the slave trade. Yet Glissant's deployment of theories of the intercultural are too embedded in the Caribbean locus accurately to reflect McKay's philosophy of encounter. Although Glissant addresses the nexus of the slave trade and multifaceted West Indian identity, it offers a more limited reading of the possibilities of mobility than that of McKay's trilogy. According to Glissant,

> there is a difference between the transplanting (by exile or dispersion) of a people who continue to survive elsewhere and the transfer (by the slave trade) of a population to another place where they change into something different, into a new set of possibilities

where they are "transformed elsewhere into another people (without, however, succumbing to the reductive pressures of the Other) . . . and . . . thus enters the constantly shifting and variable process of creolization" (14-5). McKay extends the process of 'creolization' beyond the Caribbean locus; his early recognition of the consequences of encounter may prefigure later theories of creolization, but in a context more sensitive to a global black diaspora than in the limiting terms of a singularly Caribbean context. Glissant does acknowledge the need to project the vision of creolization beyond the Caribbean and recognises similar experiences in other locations:

> Creolization as an idea is not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of a people: indeed, no people has been spared the cross-cultural process. The idea of creolization demonstrates that

> henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify 'unique' origins that the race safeguards and protects. (140)

McKay, however, moves the process into the realm of the diaspora and so creates an inclusive creolisation unlimited by location or even race. McKay tends to look outwards from the originary locus to the black diaspora in a bid to reflect the scattered nature of New World African and African displacement; that this is a unifying gesture, and one aware of the need for inclusivity, is the hallmark of McKay's own Pan-Africanism. Yet Glissant's theory of Diversion implicates McKay in a process of distraction, of looking for answers to the Caribbean reality elsewhere: "The universal identification with black suffering in the Caribbean ideology (or the poetics) of negritude also represents another manifestation of redirected energy resulting from diversion" (24). McKay's transnational lens offers a different perspective from Glissant's:

> We must return to the point from which we started. . . . a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away; that is where we most ultimately put to work the forces of creolization, or perish. (26)

Like Glissant, Torres-Saillant insists on the necessity of looking within the Caribbean for an appropriate understanding of the region; he demands the Caribbean-wide recognition of the need to examine the region in "a comparative and, to a large extent, interdisciplinary approach" (*Caribbean Poetics* 30). In contrast, McKay's trilogy encompasses a New World diaspora embedded in North American, French and Caribbean contexts and so transcends some of the limitations of a Caribbean literary aesthetic which fails adequately to represent McKay's body of work. Rather than indicating a failure to engage with his own Caribbean heritage,

McKay's novels may be read as exemplars of a transnational literature, integrating the many influences impacting upon the New World African migrant in a contemporary context. McKay's actual 'entanglement' with the Jamaica of his birthplace is avoided in his imaginative return and his habitation in Morocco, while the narrative of *Banana Bottom* buffers McKay from the uncertainties of the return from exile of the perpetual wanderer.

Brathwaite considers this problematic of realised return in the later context of writers like Selvon or Lamming, rather than in the different terms of McKay's earlier era. Questioning the experience of actual return which he himself successfully enacted, he writes: "So what happens on this rediscovered island? Does the exile returning home find new faith, his roots, some faith in the future?" (*Roots* 33). In response, Brathwaite proposes Neville Dawes' paradigm:

> The expected things you believe have changed assure you of your identity, and the simplification objects press on you make you realize the extent of your exile. . . . it is the village people you want to avoid for they link you to objects with a simplicity that breaks down twenty years of certainties, and velleities and labyrinths of tentative selves. (qtd. in Brathwaite, *Roots* 34-5)

Bita exhibits precisely this hesitancy to engage with the people of her community on her return:

> Bita was going home to visit Banana Bottom. She had made the most careful preparation for toilet, appearance and poise, for as much as she tried to ignore it she was more apprehensive about revisiting her obscure village than she had been going abroad to Europe. (48)

Lamming, although he is writing in the changed context of postcolonialism, echoes Bita's caution and doubtfulness. On board the *Queen Mary* from Southampton to New York, he encountered Scottish, Irish and English migrants who expressed their discomfort with return:

> they always spoke with great nostalgia for their childhood. These were wonderful days; but one experience always seemed to spoil the wonder of the past. This was the experience of meeting their old friends. . . . This return to the past, now measured by their different orientation in a new country, a new civilisation, created a certain duality in their desires. Somehow they would have liked to remain with their root; and yet they would not have changed their new life for anything in the world. (*The Pleasures of Exile* 184)[75]

McKay's imaginative return shields him from the traumatic encounter with false certainties and the experience of alienation, and protecting himself from potential isolation there must have surely, if only partly, informed his decision not to return to Jamaica. McKay indulges in the safety of nostalgia for the landscape of his childhood, and as Louis James proposes, "into the main character Bita he projected his own glowing memories of childhood" (*Caribbean Literature in English* 50).

The gulf between memory and reality is the subject of David Dabydeen's novel *The Intended.* The narrator recalls his Guyanese childhood and the character of his grandfather in the rural context from a position of exile:

[75] Fanon indicates an alternative experience for the returning migrant: "The Negro who knows the mother country is a demigod. . . . Many of them, after stays of varying length in metropolitan France, go home to be deified" (10-1).

> He took up his stick, went to the jamoon tree at the edge of the cow pen, prodded among the branches, snapped off a twig laden with purple fruit, and gave it to me. . . . This is how I remember him, but perhaps in the treeless cold of Bedford Hill, vegetation rotting in the gutter and the whores climbing in and out of motorcars, I fabricate this memory, and his stick becomes a wand which with one wave conjures up a dream world. (*The Intended* 25)

The very notion of 'conjure' then epitomises the complexity of the third instalment of McKay's trilogy because so much of the novel is imagined, and so deeply impacted upon by the Moroccan location of its composition. A conventional novel, it nonetheless challenges the linear expectations of a trilogy which so far has voiced the male experiences of exile, sexuality and mobility.

The absence of actual return also impacts upon McKay's position as a foundational figure in a Caribbean literary tradition. His initiation of a literary motif of return and of folk culture in *Banana Bottom* is significant, and yet McKay is excluded from most accounts of 'return' in the West Indian context. Lamming asserts in *The Pleasures of Exile* that it was not until Selvon, Mais, Salkey, and Carew began to write of the peasantry that West Indian literary convention accepted the folk as a valid and non-imitative subject matter:

> For the first time the West Indian peasant became other than a cheap source of labour. He became, through the novelist's eye, a living existence, living in silence and joy and fear, involved in riot and carnival. It is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality. (39)

To overlook McKay's *Banana Bottom* as Lamming does here is to identify a wider reluctance to consider West Indian writing in the interwar years. McKay may also be excluded by virtue of the fact that unlike other migrants, he never returned to the Caribbean himself. It is crucial, however, to acknowledge the economic depression of the 1930s in which McKay is writing, a context quite unlike that of the emergent nationalist movements of the 1950s. C.L.R. James has admitted to not knowing "much about West Indian literature in the 1930s—there wasn't much to know" (qtd. in Donnell and Lawson Welsh 16).[76] McKay's engagement with the dignity of the peasantry and the plight of the lower classes throughout his trilogy remains overlooked: Michael J. Dash, for instance, credits Alejo Carpentier with writing the first Caribbean novel in which wandering is inscribed on the narrative. In Carpentier's *The Lost Steps*, "the protagonist's itinerary does not lead to authentic experience but to endless permutations or detours from its original intention" (86). However, he credits McKay with developing "the idea of the hybrid personality whose legitimacy is equal to that of the native inhabitant" (101). This must be read specifically in relation to *Banana Bottom*, but is should be noted that Dash distances Bita from her community by implying that the exile, the 'hybrid' character is no longer 'native.' Bita returns to the originary space, and although now altered by her experiences and her European education, she successfully reintegrates into that

[76] Thomas MacDermot's "The All Jamaica Library" sponsored by "The Jamaica Times" which ran from 1904 to 1909 is highlighted by Donnell and Lawson Welsh as proof of West Indian cultural productivity in the early decades of the 20th century, along with the creation of the James Hill Literary Society in 1912, and the founding of the Poetry League of Jamaica in 1923 (27-8). These efforts to encourage literary activity and intellectual exchange suggest that the early decades were overlooked by Lamming perhaps, to a large extent because of the regional and limited nature of their audience in a colonial era.

community. Bita's representative role stimulates debate about McKay's imaginary return, but Dash nevertheless reads McKay in overly simplistic terms when he criticises his recreation of "the ideal of an organic, traditional community, safe from the unrelenting spread of modernity" as "a self-indulgent fantasy" (101). Dash erases McKay's position as exile, and in Africa, at the time of writing the novel, as well as his turbulent marginalisation from human communities throughout his vagabond years. While the trilogy and the imagined return are inflected with autobiography, certainly, to label such a complex multidimensional work merely "self-indulgent" is in effect to deny McKay the right to vocalise what for him was the unrealisable act of homecoming.

McKay's literary enactment of return delineated in the trilogy is a motif with which he first experimented in his 1932 collection of stories, *Gingertown.* As will emerge in the conclusion to this thesis, McKay had already played with the notion of exile and return in these stories, and explored the ramifications for narrative when multiple locations and various constructions of home are sequentially and imaginatively constructed. His figurative enactment of return in *Banana Bottom* in 1933 emphasises once again his dedication to the life of the migrant, but the endowment of 'home' to Bita reflects the complexity of motifs of return in his writing. McKay's international, transnational and West Indian identities render his trilogy of the New World diaspora a narrative "unbounded by little national and racial lines, but a cosmic thing of all time for all minds" (McKay, *Banana Bottom* 314).

Conclusion

Gingertown (1932)

Conclusion

Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile

Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile

Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile

A long ways from home (Spiritual)

St. Clair Drake writes in his introduction to McKay's autobiography, *A Long Way From Home*, published in 1937, that

> McKay does not emphasize his West Indianness but rather his blackness, his solidarity with Afro-Americans and Africans. He was keenly conscious of being a child of the diaspora, revealing sentiments similar to those in the Negro spiritual: 'Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long way from home.' (xi)

This spiritual was arranged and published by Harry Thacker Burleigh in 1917. McKay's adaptation of its first verse, in the title of his autobiography, brings together the loss of the maternal figure which affected McKay the man, with the restless vagabondage which characterises McKay the writer. Transcending the confines of Caribbean, American, European, Russian, North African and colonial literary landscapes, McKay projects an early vision of transnationalism in his trilogy of exile, mobility and imagined return. Identifying movement and encounter as the conditions for the evolution of diasporic communities which flout racial, sexual or political hegemony, McKay celebrates the urge to move beyond the bordered locus to liminal sites of cultural and interpersonal encounter. The thematic persistence of

homocentric mobility in McKay's novels speaks to a philosophical discomfort with settlement, as testified by the rupture in characterisation between his first two picaresque novels of male mobility to the third in the trilogy, the female novel of settlement. We identify in McKay's fictions the privileging of movement as the precondition for encounter, and we recognise the cultural productivity which he believed resulted from the rejection of mono-culturalism, indicating how deeply symptomatic of his desire for ideological expansion and global cultural renovation was McKay's own migrancy.

Thus, in the appropriately titled *A Long Way From Home*, McKay writes of the need to "Go, better than stand still, keep going" (150). This articulation of restlessness, voiced most profoundly in McKay's picaresque novels, suggests that we should re-read these texts in conjunction with his short stories, his documentaries and his autobiographic works, all of which testify to the importance of personal mobility to his perspective. St. Clair Drake considers the problematics of autobiography as a mode for McKay:

> The genre is one in which more intimate aspects of the autobiographer's personal experience are subordinated to social commentary and reflections upon what it means to be a Negro in a world dominated by white men. . . . The traumatic effects of the black experience seem to have made confessional writing an intellectual luxury black writers cannot afford. (x)

In the light of such comments, McKay's two works of autobiography, *A Long Way from Home* (1937) and the posthumously published *My Green Hills of Jamaica* (1979), give us a framework for reading his transnational fictions. Mervyn Morris

writes in his introduction to *My Green Hills of Jamaica*: "the autobiographical information often illuminates aspects of the poems, novels and short stories. . . . There is often a close correspondence between fact and fiction" (ix). [77] Frank Harris, editor of *Pearson's* magazine and McKay's first literary influence outside the Caribbean, encouraged him to evolve beyond his preoccupation with poetry. Harris understood prose to be a quintessentially modernist medium and the most appropriate mode of communicating the experience of the migrant of the 1920s, as if anticipating social and personal facets of McKay's fictional accounts of vagabondage:

> You must write prose . . . . Poetry was the unique literary expression of the feudal and semi-feudal age: the romantic periods. But this is the great machine age . . . . Language is loosening and breaking up under the pressure of new ideas and words. It requires the flexibility of prose to express this age. (Harris qtd. in McKay, *ALWFH* 20)

Acknowledging another ambivalence in McKay's writing, North argues that the modernism of McKay's narrative of vagabondage is problematic, not because of its unsuitability as a means of rendering the black migratory experience, but because it is too suitable, and therefore appealing to the fears expressed by Ray in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* of black cultural degeneration and stereotyping:

[77] Barbara Griffin delineates the publication history of the work: "*My Green Hills of Jamaica* is an autobiographical account of McKay's childhood in the West Indies. Although the book was not published until 1979, the manuscript was drafted sometime in 1946, two years before the writer's death in 1948" ("The Road to Psychic Unity" 499).

> The problem is not that there is no place for Jake in modernist fiction, but there was already a place far too well prepared. How could McKay make the sort of defense of black folk culture he wanted when it constantly appeared in the literature of the time in the form of the comic primitive? (117)

As we repeatedly see, both McKay's writing and his shallowly disguised characters' ideologies resist placement in limiting canonical categories. His commitment to liminal spaces and transcendent identities in his own life, detailed in his autobiographies, is projected into his novels; the arc of transnationalism which epitomises his lived experience is traceable in his novels. Re-reading McKay's marginality in the contemporary terms of transnationalism forges a place for McKay in a canon which exceeds the formulations of literatures which are rigidly defined by nationality or genre, while also drawing new attention to McKay's own exploration of the values and supportive alliances created in liminal loci. For McKay, ironically, the mainstream or the majority were the ideological loci of alienation, and he elucidates a position which appreciates the objectivity, rather than the isolation, of being on the margins. Harold Cruse suggests that McKay "remained at all times, the critical outsider looking in, the objective traveller passing through on his way to the next adventure or attraction" (48). "Through it all," writes Cruse, "he was a wanderer, seeking something 'a long way from home'" (48). McKay delineates in *A Long Way*, how, on his return to New York from England in 1921, he craved the border spaces of outer Manhattan:

> Like fixed massed sentinels guarding the approaches to the great metropolis, again the pyramids of New York in their Egyptian majesty dazzled my sight like a miracle of might. . . . Oh, I wished that it was

> possible to know New York in that way only—as a masterpiece wrought for the illumination of the sight. . . . Oh, that I should never draw nearer to descend into its precipitous gorges, where visions are broken and shattered and one becomes one of a million, average, ordinary, insignificant. (95)

Later McKay would render the geopolitically peripheral communities of Harlem, Marseilles and Jamaica, and he specifically documents the corresponding fluidity of Harlem and Marseilles, suggesting that below 116th Street is

> the alluring borderline of every type, where all species of humanity mix pell mell. It has something of the quality of the Vieux Port of Marseille, only it is minus the flotsam and jetsam of the immediate waves with the ships arriving and departing. (*Harlem: Negro Metropolis* 28-9)

Both these passages provide an insight into the motivation for his insistence on the depiction of collectives which can evolve both on the margins, and in the space between the centre and periphery, and which exploit the possibilities of mobility between these places, as McKay himself was doing in the 1920s and 1930s. Identity is more lucidly conceived in apposition to the 'average, ordinary, insignificant' millions.

As suggested in Chapter One, McKay's decision to hide behind personal anecdotes and tales of fellow vagabonds in *A Long Way From Home* functions to shield him from the scrutiny of society. This 'screening' also operates in his novels: *Home to Harlem* buffers McKay from personal engagement with queer narration; *Banjo* delves into proletarian Atlantic politics without fully revealing the extent of

his Pan-Africanism and creates a homosocial context where familial responsibility can be overlooked, while *Banana Bottom* complexly reflects on imagined and gendered homecomings and heteronormative island life. The complex interconnectivity of autobiography and fiction is not a unique feature of McKay's writing, of course. Yet his autobiography of his youth, *My Green Hills of Jamaica*, allows us to access the paradoxically 'authentic' voice of his fictions. Morris suggests:

> The draft autobiography is valuable . . . for what it tells us of the particular individual who will be—and [in 1946] has been—poet of the Harlem Renaissance, radical journalist, friend and critic of Communism, lionized visitor to Russia, vagabond in Europe and North Africa, best-selling novelist, forgotten writer, Catholic convert; a complex ambivalent man; a maverick. Here we have the roots of Claude McKay. (*Introduction* vii)

McKay's picaresque novels have provoked critical disagreement and evaded popular acclaim. Yet his awkward positioning outside acceptable canonical 'boundaries' in itself emerges in this thesis as a locus for the creation of a trilogy of marginality and diasporic union. A Lockean or Du Boisean middle class fear of segregation is in tension with McKay's formulation of minority independence and resilience, and it on this issue McKay becomes explicitly personal. Against charges of segregation, he asserts that his vision fortifies the culturally liminal, revealing his faith in the values extolled in his fictional trilogy:

> It is a plain fact that the entire world of humanity is more or less segregated in groups. The family group gave rise to the tribal group,

> the tribal group to the regional group, and the regional group to the national group. . . . Certainly no sane group desires public segregation and discrimination. But it is a clear historical fact that different groups have won their social rights only when they developed a group spirit and strong group organization. (*ALWFH* 350)

We derive a meaning from his autobiography which enriches our reading of his fictions. His philosophies of humanity and group organisation are lucidly communicated in his autobiographical account of his youth, underlining how his understanding of human interaction and community derives from his Jamaican heritage: "As a child I was never interested in different kinds of tribes and races. People of all kinds were just people to me. I had a romantic feeling about the different kinds of races and nations of people" (*My Green Hills* 61).

McKay writes in *My Green Hills of Jamaica:*

> There were ships from the United States, Panama, Cuba, Canada, South America, Germany, and Britain. Kingston, Jamaica, was an important port of call in the West Indies, so ships from all over were attracted there. As I thought of the places from which those ships came, I wondered if I would ever have a chance to visit them. (Morris 20)

That the young, Jamaican McKay, embedded in the rural Caribbean, would confer such significance on ships, travel and diverse countries is unsurprising, considering the later manifestations of these fascinations in his fiction and specifically in *Banjo*. What is perhaps more notable, is that these elements play a more dominant role as elements of the narrative of his fictions than in his accounts of his personal

peripatetic life, and are integrated into the thematic evolution of his prose oeuvre. He did, we know, visit innumerable locations all over North America, Europe, Russia and North Africa, and yet it is his situating of his narratives in these loci—narratives both published and unpublished—that we paradoxically engage with the personal vision of McKay at its most robustly transnational.

In 1930, McKay wrote a novel which remains unpublished, but was titled at various stages of its composition, *The Jungle and The Bottoms*, *Savage Loving*, and *Romance in Marseilles*.[78] While containing characters, contexts and scenes reminiscent of *Banjo*, Cooper sees it as a moment of departure in McKay's career from the picaresque mode of his two published novels, and suggests that the manuscript "proved transitional in McKay's development as a novelist" (*Claude McKay* 266). The novel was McKay's last engagement with the mobile male communities of the black diaspora depicted in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, suggesting perhaps his increasing need and desire for community and settlement expressed in *Gingertown* and fully developed in *Banana Bottom.* Cooper notes the appearance in the unpublished manuscript of an openly homosexual couple, whose sexuality and the prejudices they encounter are "frankly and sympathetically discussed" (*Claude McKay* 268). That McKay would himself veto its publishing, and proceed with his short stories instead, is perhaps indicative of the homophobia and intolerance endemic in his potential readership, but also perhaps of his working out

[78] The manuscript entitled *Romance in Marseilles* is currently stored in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture as a microfilm.

of his own complex sexuality.[79] *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* contain identifiable but veiled undercurrents of homosexuality, and yet McKay's exploration of openly homosexual relationships in his unpublished manuscript may suggest the cathartic function of his literary treatment of sexuality. Having explored it in *Romance in Marseilles*, he may have been, to an extent, released from his disguised preoccupation with male sexuality, to pursue a novel which allowed him vicariously to attain the unattainable—homecoming and heterosexual intimacy and marriage. Rather than suggesting his novels are mere projections of all that went unfulfilled in his life, McKay can be seen to commit to his fictions an interwoven collaboration of fact and fiction, supported by his engagement with diverse loci, which is perhaps a more appropriate symbol of his literary evolution than linear or temporal understandings of his oeuvre.

McKay experiments, then, in his 1932 collection of short stories, *Gingertown*, with multiple locations as contexts for his narratives, and in his creation of a collection of stories which are both urban and rural, American, European, North African and Caribbean, it can be suggested that this 1932 publication serves as a microcosm of his trilogy, while also suggestively revealing reconsiderations of certain tropes and motifs.[80] Considering its publication one year before *Banana*

[79] McKay withdrew the novel in 1930 because he was dissatisfied with it. However, having rewritten it and improved it, he set about looking for a publisher again in 1933; it would remain unpublished, and undesired by publishing houses (Cooper, *Claude McKay* 285-8).

[80] It is important to note also that not only do the short stories in *Gingertown* embrace the diverse locations of McKay's own vagabondage, but they also span the key period of his engagement with prose. As Cooper outlines, *Gingertown "*consisted of six Harlem stories he had begun in the mid-1920s, four more recent stories of Jamaican country life, and two concluding stories, one set in a

Bottom, McKay engages in the collection with the possibilities of narratives of the picaresque but also with tales of homecoming and heteronormative settlement. Barbara Griffin suggests that *Banana Bottom* is "but a fictional precursor to *My Green Hills of Jamaica*" and proposes the complementarity of the two 'Jamaican' texts ("The Road" 500). Yet I argue that even more significant is the way in which *Gingertown* acts as a blueprint for McKay's trilogy, and informs our understanding of his departure to the Jamaican locus of rural Banana Bottom for the final novel in a trilogy so far characterised by homocentric vagabondage in American and European contexts. As discussed in Chapter Three, Cooper sees a contrast in the short stories contained in *Gingertown*, between those which deal with the loneliness of Harlem life and those focused on community in Jamaica, as the characters exhibit an ease in the rural which is unavailable in the urban context (*The Passion* 156-7). The fact that this binary is explored in short story form in 1932, just prior to the publication of *Banana Bottom* in 1933, indicates McKay's exploration of alternatives to the picaresque mobility of *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo.* This consequently underlines *Banana Bottom's* viability, since he commits to a novel this leap of location and characterisation. That such diverse surroundings should co-exist in McKay's trilogy is reflected in the sentiments of Barclay, a character in "Truant," a Harlem based story in *Gingertown*, who closely resembles Ray. Both West Indian men struggle to balance their education, their roles as fathers and husbands, and their temporary settlement in the urban space which for Barclay, embodies elements of his rural home:

Mediterranean port similar to Marseilles and the other in an Arab city resembling Tangier" (*Claude McKay* 272).

> The steel-framed poetry of cities did not crowd out but rather intensified in him the singing memories of his village life. He loved both, the one complementing the other. Against the intricate stone-and-steel flights of humanity's mass spirit, misty in space and time, hovered the green charms of his village. (159)

That McKay could conceive of such a synthesis before writing his Jamaican novel of gendered return supports a multi-dimensional reading of *Gingertown* as an exploration of the short story form, as a final reflection on the picaresque, and as an experimental microcosm of McKay's trilogy and its diverse concerns. Barclay's life, which is reminiscent of McKay's on many levels, was "a continual fluxion from one state to another" (160).[81]

"Brown Skin Blues," the first short story in the collection, is set primarily in Harlem and depicts a world of cabarets and sweet-men so reminiscent of McKay's oft-reviled *Home to Harlem,* suggesting both his resilience to the criticism of his earlier novel, and indicating his faith in Harlem as a viable locus for the exploration of black cultural identity. Lenox Avenue is invoked very much in Jake's terms, and the nightclubs are even more decadent:

> The cabaret was decorated in gold and black, with a fresco of Egyptian-like figures over the music stand. The ceiling was covered

[81] McKay can be seen to be merging the literary modes of autobiography and fiction again in *Gingertown* and most potently in "Truant." Barclay, the West Indian would-be picaro questions what "enchantment had lured him away from the green intimate life that clustered round his village—the simple African-transplanted life of the West Indian hills?" (152). Barclay too tries to render his experiences through his poetry, trying to "capture some of those fleeting piled up images" which his railroad companions "teased him for writing" (159).

> thick with artificial autumn leaves in which were imbedded clusters of tiny electric bulbs. (3)

The personal and socio-economic demise of the female protagonist, Bess, because of her pursuit of bleach-white skin, enables a surprisingly clichéd dénouement, as her male 'hero,' Jack, proclaims his love for her despite her facial disfigurement: "Ef I coulda only been convinced you could like me like a yaller gal, I nevah woulda messed mah face up" (30-1). "Fohget it," Jack insists, "It ain't the color that counts, honey; it's the stuff. Every man his own stuff" (30-1). In this version of Harlem, the heteronormative predominates, suggesting both a re-vision of his own literary devices and a movement towards the type of relationship extolled in *Banana Bottom*, exemplified in Bita and Jubban's union. The homosociality which supports male collective bonding in *Home to Harlem* is re-imagined within a framework of heterosexual settlement and partnership: "Don't worry, honey. Youse the same Bess to me. I was always you' friend and I think you needs a steady one now. You need a home and Ise got one foh you" (30). The home, finally, is in New York City, where Bess submits to Jack's masculinity and promises of support: "Oh, daddy! Oh, daddy!" (31). Bess is content to assume the role of the dependent; Bita becomes a modified version of this childlike female, as she successfully merges a marital dependence on Jubban with a sustained and independent nourishment of her intellectual identity.

Yet reflecting the progress of his trilogy, McKay defies narrative expectations. His second short story of Harlem, "The Prince of Porto Rico," introduces a homoerotic spectacle which departs from the heterosocial context of "Brown Skin Blues." In the barbers of Latin-Harlem, Cuban and Puerto Rican masseurs tend to the bodies of the working class men:

> Massage! How the boys of the Belt like it. It is a sight to see . . . strolling through the Belt on a Saturday night while the dark dandies are getting massaged. . . . Hombre! Pink cream smeared all over chocolate skin. Sugar-brown experts bending over chocolate lads, luxuriating under the process and dreaming sweet-scented rendezvous with the chippies. (33)

This sensual scene provokes expectations of a more openly same sex narrative than McKay created in his two picaresque novels but echoes the theme and content of *Romance in Marseilles*. However, rather than focusing on the interactions between men, this merely serves as an undermining prologue to a story which plays to further stereotypical depictions of passive women and dominant men. Tillie, a Harlem 'grass widow,' falls for the Puerto Rican 'Prince,' Manuel, and is consumed by her increasing attraction to him: "The Prince's eyes had captured her. He had become a fever in her flesh" (40). The Prince is posited, however, as the epitome of freedom, much like Jake and Ray, not captive or subservient to any woman: "'Oh, I love a lot . . . I love the girls. I love the boys. I love to love. I love love, but I never did let love make a fool of me. Love is easy'" (40). As in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, the masculine bond is not weakened by the intimacies with women, while the type of mutual respect between husband and wife delineated in *Banana Bottom* is unavailable. Women are depicted in a problematic role again, indicating just how significant the depiction of Bita is, figuring as the first fully realised female character in his fiction, and who evolves from the position of child to woman. In "The Prince of Porto Rico," Tillie functions merely as a novelty for the Prince: "He loved the lovely creatures the more because of their illogical enthusiasm that kept the world crazy all the time" (42). The undercurrent of chauvinism in *Home to Harlem* and

Banjo, which reflects McKay's homosocial preoccupation rather than any straightforward sexism, here emerges as a more problematic anti-female sentiment, as repeatedly woman is depicted as deceitful and 'illogical.' One glance from the Prince leaves Bella, the madam of a 'buffet-flat' "as embarrassed as a ripe young virgin" (43). The type of independence Latnah has in *Banjo*, or the intellectual identity granted Bita, is absent in these depictions of women, and the stories function to an extent as a working out of the complex ambivalences McKay held towards women and their role in male patterns of mobility.

Elements of the theme and plot of "Truant" in *Gingertown* replicate those of *Banjo*. McKay revisits the quandary of the restless male vagabond who resists the roles of father and husband as impediments to the wanderer's mobility. The protagonist, Barclay, a reinvented Ray, is irritated by the draw of familial responsibility to his wife Rhoda and daughter Betsy, and associates the loss of his personal goals with the gaining of a family: "Rhoda now seemed only another impasse from which he had drifted. Just a hole to pull out of again. . . . He had to evade it and be irresponsible again." (160). Defining irresponsibility as the aim of the vagabond perhaps suggests McKay's recognition, in 1932, of the self-interestedness of the migrant's desires; it points, also, to McKay's awareness of his own 'irresponsibility' in never seeing the child he fathered with his ex-wife. Yet McKay depicts Barclay as existing beyond the realm of conventional morality, unbound by the kind of social mores which impact upon Rhoda's worldview:

> Spiritually he was subject to another law. Other gods of strange barbaric glory claimed his allegiance and not the grim frock-coated gentleman of the Moral Law of the land. The Invisible Law that upheld those magnificent machines and steel spiring temples and new

> cathedrals erected to the steel-flung traffic plan of man. Oh, he could understand and love the poetry of them but not their law that held humanity gripped in fear. (160-1)

McKay's conception of male migrancy has profound resonances with the New World African philosophies discussed by the marginal communities of mobile men depicted in his picaresque novels; that he insists on their positioning outside capitalism and materialism emphasises his faith in the liminal society, and of the importance of transatlantic passage and encounter. Leaving his family and taking the path worn by Jake and Ray, Barclay's actions affirm McKay's personal choices to avoid familial bonds. Indeed, Mary Conroy suggests that "The fiction of Barclay is the fact of McKay" (16). Yet even more significant than the thematic repetition and autobiographical correspondence to the fiction is the positioning of this flight in "Truant." As the only story in *Gingertown* to endorse abandonment of the family and to permit male flight, it is immediately followed by a short story set in a West Indian village, centring on the folk life of the rural peasantry. McKay's resolve to grant the vagabond flight, and then engage with the island settlement in its most rooted form in "The Agricultural Show," the story placed immediately after "Truant," presages the complex movement of theme and characterisation from *Banjo* to *Banana Bottom* in the trilogy. Just as Barclay is resigned to the realisation that "his true life lay in eternal inquietude," so too does McKay's 'true' life conform to such a conviction.[82]

[82] Conroy suggests that the centrality of vagabondage in McKay's two picaresque novels is readable clearly in his own life: "Without question, these same vagabond elements in McKay's personal life were frequently extreme psychological gestures to escape the harshness of life, having thus only a tangential relationship to the picaresque tradition" (16). To suggest that McKay has a tangential relationship to the picaresque tradition, is, I argue, to essentially erase the potent connections between

His imaginative life, however, may be more amenable to the settlement of the Jamaican rural village depicted in *Banana Bottom* and "The Agricultural Show."

Rooted in the peasantry, "The Agricultural Show" is a barely-veiled fictional version of episodes in *My Green Hills of Jamaica,* and as such is almost an archetypal McKay literary product. The showcasing of rural products, the exploration of the mother and child bond, the pride in the local choir, the anticipation of visits from the Governor and other colonial representatives culminate in the story to highlight the way in which McKay uses the form and content of *Gingertown* to synthesise the diverse concerns of his Jamaican fictions and memories. Located so recognisably in the environs of his rural childhood, and fictionalising his family members, we see the beginning of McKay's imaginative return to Jamaica which is fully realised in *Banana Bottom.* The older brother figure of the short story, Mathew, is a clear evocation of U' Theo McKay. In "The Agricultural Show" Mathew is described as "the most serious and respected and the cleverest of his school. . . . He brought the village local fame when he trained a choir of young peasants to sing 'The Messiah'" (164-5). McKay writes in *My Green Hills* that Theo was "a very good choirmaster. . . . It was said that my brother was the first person in the country to stage the 'Hallelujah Chorus' of the great musician Handel" (Morris 35). The attitudes of the villagers in *Banana Bottom* to authority and perceived 'greatness' is traceable in both *Gingertown* and *My Green Hills*, indicating again the appeal of autobiography as fictional material. In "The Agricultural Show," social hierarchy and urban prejudices are fore-fronted when an ambitious choral performance is advertised: "The announcement of the performance provoked a little curiosity in the

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McKay's autobiographic and fictional writings and to diminish the impact and implications of Jake and Ray's flight at the end of *Banjo* and their complex relationship.

city, and a couple of newspapermen took a brief country holiday to see it. They were sure they would have something funny to write" (166). In *My Green Hills,* McKay recalls how a concert organised by his brother "was so well advertised that the two dailies in Kingston and the weekly sent down reporters . . . just to see what we hillbillies would make of classical music" (Morris 38). That the texts resonate with one another underlines the detailed exploration in this thesis of the imbrication of fiction and autobiography in McKay's writing.[83] More than simple repetition of motifs, this echoing of events points to the validation of the island as a culturally productive site, amenable to the construction of a full-length novel in *Banana Bottom*. There is a symmetry of fact and fiction: the preoccupation is, at this point in McKay's career, less with the picaro and the vagabond, and more with the interactions and bonds of family and community, situated as McKay was in North Africa at the time of writing both *Banana Bottom* and *Gingertown*, in a proxy 'home.' His concerns in the Caribbean short story are reflected in the Caribbean novel and in his second autobiography, and allow his oeuvre to be conceived as intercultural in its attention to the multiplicity of experiences, locations and encounters which fully embody the transnationalism at the core of McKay's writing.

Yet, as if to affirm his personal choices and his commitment to perpetual migrancy, and signifying his resolve to create 'inconclusive conclusions,' McKay

[83] There are also many moments of parity between McKay's posthumously published work of fiction *Harlem Glory: A Fragment of Aframerican Life* (1990), and his 1940 work of documentary, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis.* This constant blending of fact and fiction becomes emblematic of McKay's style, and can be suggested to endorse an analysis of the liminal and ambivalent qualities of his writing as suitable symbolic loci from which to render his personally transnational vagabondage.

reverts to a French and then a Moroccan setting for the final short stories in *Gingertown.* As Carl Cowl suggests:

> The author of Banjo—which is significantly subtitled 'A Story Without A Plot'—simply did not share the concerns of those who believe that every loose narrative thread must be neatly tied up in the end. In this sense, McKay was a truer realist than many writers who had borne this label, for life itself he considered 'A Story Without A Plot.'(7)

While McKay roots the final novel of the trilogy in the pastures of his youth, its imaginative return is a core feature. In reality, McKay's restlessness was less easily tamed. *Gingertown* can be considered an experimental outline for the trilogy; that the collection concludes with two stories of migrancy suggests McKay's conscious decision to re-work this ending in his novels. His decision to situate the last novel of exile in the place of his birth is all the more remarkable when compared with the ending of *Gingertown*, as seen in "Nigger Lover" and "Little Sheik." His short stories permit continued mobility and a lack of rootedness which epitomises McKay's life; his trilogy engages with the transnationalism of his lived experience, and yet unites him to the community of his childhood. Just like Banjo, McKay's life "was a dream of vagabondage that he was perpetually pursuing and realizing in odd ways, always incomplete but never unsatisfactory" (McKay, *Banjo* 11).

"Nigger Lover" evokes the flux of Marseilles which informs the transnational dimension of *Banjo*. Although the precise location of the story is unspecified, it is a return to the haven of the picaro:

> Down by the waterfront of this extensive and lively southern port, . . . in that humming hive of seamen no one deeply cares whether one is a nigger lover or no. They are all mixed up and mix in down there in the same common hole. . . . Yellow, brown, white, black. Far Orient, Occident, African, and broad-based Mediterranean. (247-8)

Detailing the preference of a prostitute in the port for black clients, McKay returns briefly to the world of fleeting intimacies which characterised Jake's relationship with Harlem, and again permits the flight of the male seafarer, unhindered by the female companion: "He dressed. She was still fast asleep. . . . Then he sprung the catch of the lock and went out closing the door" (257).

Moving out of the Mediterranean port of "Nigger Lover," "Little Sheik" is set in a North African city where the female American protagonist of the story encounters "crenelated walls and cubic masses of buildings of ancient yellow and gray and heard the strange murmur of an invisible hive of humanity stirring to begin the day" (261). Enlisting the services of an unofficial tour guide—the Little Sheik—the American visits the city's souks, museums and most significantly, the Madersa—the all-male university. That she gains access to the homocentric environment is significant, indicating McKay's first literary engagement with female intellectual identity. Described as an "independent U.S.A." girl, she possesses a freedom granted previously only to McKay's male characters:

> This girl had impulsively deserted her friends and started out alone on a trail with an objective of sunlight and warmth, and woke up one morning to find herself almost miraculously in the fortress town of the little sheik. (261-2)

This vision of female vagabondage is singular in McKay's writing, and it is suggestively his last fictional product prior to his depiction of Bita, who merges the culture of her youth with the intellectualism and independence of her education in exile. Rendered in language reminiscent of that used to convey the picaresque lives of Jake, Ray and Banjo, this female character again provides an insight into McKay's vision of mobility, as this character, described perhaps satirically as "Miss U.S.A.," fails in her quest for unhindered freedom. She becomes trapped in the university, literally, but trapped also by its homocentric dominance, and is threatened by the advances of a student:

> She was nearer than ever then to a personal and romantic realisation of that place as she might have dreamed it, but in her impersonal relaxation she became uncomfortably aware of his proximity, . . . she took horror of him, his mustache approaching like a nasty bird, and quickly disengaging herself, she fled. (271)

As Stephens suggests: "McKay's little fable of utopia abruptly shifts tone when the hybrid heroine suddenly discovers that the fortress town is not meant for the likes of her" (*Black Empire* 170). Her idealism is negatively impacted upon by her gender, as she is out of place both in the university, and in a world dominated by male vagabondage. Abandoned by the tour guide, she flees the university and its aggressive masculinity, and yet she seeks further male assistance to return to her temporary home in the city:

> Outside the gate, hesitant, uncertain of what direction to take, she was approached courteously by a Moor who asked her in her own language if anything was wrong and suggested he might be able to

> help. She was happy to hear her mother tongue. . . . The Moor conducted her to her hotel and she thanked and fed him liberally. (271-2)

'Her own language,' we can infer, is the language from which she strayed when she sought access to male domains. 'Her language' can then be understood as one of security and of female reliance on men. McKay's vision is transnational, but is resolutely homocentric in its emphasis on the viability of mobile communities of men. As Stephens emphasises: "The black transnational male's story provides an alternative vision of global modernity, one in which the little sheiks of McKay's black transnational world play a starring role" (*Black Empire* 171).

Rereading McKay's body of fiction through the contemporary theoretical paradigms of transnationalism and black Atlanticism, while acknowledging his percipient exploration of Négritude and his particular version of Pan-Africanism, indicates his genuine engagement with the diverse socio-cultural movements of his lifetime. The trajectory of his literary career is profoundly transnational in its multi-locational quality, as he renders the experience of the socially, sexually, racially and culturally liminal and thus incorporates the marginalised and those of the 'in-between' spaces of the Black Atlantic in his expansive and intercultural oeuvre. Evoking the loci of his vagabondage in his trilogy of exile and homecoming, his personal and fictional celebration of the peripheral zones of encounter has a canon-altering impact and troubles the canons in which he is routinely positioned. Understanding McKay as a cultural activist who employed a transnational frame of reference to evade hegemonic ideologies is facilitated by Muthyala's 'reworlding' construct, and underlines the value McKay placed upon minority affiliation and encounter. The centrality of Paul Gilroy's theory of the Black Atlantic has

productively expanded those encounters celebrated by McKay, and the pre-visioning of such contemporary constructs of diaspora further emphasises McKay's role as an exemplar of a transnational world view. His engagement with and, perhaps more notably, his resistance to Caribbeanist theories of culture, not only enhances his position as a leading voice in a re-imagined New World African and Caribbean canon but also stresses the transgressive qualities of McKay's own fictions. This excerpt from *A Long Way From Home* encapsulates the philosophies explored in this thesis:

> A chaoush [native doorman and messenger] from the British Consulate had accosted me in a souk one day and asked whether I was American. I said I was born in the West Indies and lived in the United States and that I was an American even though I was a British subject, but I preferred to think of myself as an internationalist. The chaoush said he didn't understand what was an internationalist. I laughed and said that an internationalist was a bad nationalist. (300)

A 'bad nationalist,' a transnationalist and an internationalist, Claude McKay concludes: "All my life I have been a troubadour wanderer, nourishing myself mainly on the poetry of existence. And all I offer . . . is the distilled poetry of my existence" (*ALWFH* 354).

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