11-16-2016

The Non-Identical Anglophone *Bildungsroman*: From the Categorical to the De-Centering Literary Subject in the Black Atlantic

Jarad Heath Fennell
University of South Florida, jfennel2@mail.usf.edu

The Non-Identical Anglophone *Bildungsroman*: From the Categorical to the De-Centering

Literary Subject in the Black Atlantic

by

Jarad Fennell

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Hunt Hawkins, Ph.D.
Marty Gould, Ph.D.
Gurleen Grewal, Ph.D.
Ylce Irizarry, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
October 25, 2016

Keywords: post-colonial, British, African, African-American, feminist

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Cheryl Fennell-Konyha, my wife, Elizabeth Valle, and my children, Carmen Fennell and Isaac Fennell, who continue to inspire me every day. I would also like to dedicate this work to my father, Joseph Fennell, and my stepfather and stepmother, John Konya and Susan Fennell, who were integral to my own development over the years. Thank you for believing in me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

My goal with this dissertation was to discover more about how the *Bildungsroman* genre or the coming-of-age story in English became a staple of post-colonial and ethnic minority writing. I grew up reading novels like these and feel a great deal of affection for them, and I wanted to understand how authors writing in these other traditions represented a broader response to colonialist Western culture. My method was to survey philosophical approaches to subjectivity and subject-formation, read a wide variety of texts I understood as engaging with the *Bildung* tradition, and examine how they represented subject-formation.

While I originally saw the appropriation of the genre as a revolutionary act that fundamentally changed the nature of the *Bildungsroman*, I found that the *Bildungsroman* contained a germ of this oppositional, in Theodor Adorno's terminology non-identical, subjectivity throughout its existence as a type in English literature. The opposition of writers of *Bildung* to heteronormative, racist, and sexist discourse is what brought out this non-identical strain more forcefully and ultimately culminated in contemporary manifestations of the *Bildungsroman* that rejected essentialism and represented subjectivity as strategic, hyphenated, and positioned against a centered, stable identity.

The positive significance of studying these texts as featuring a de-centering literary subject is that it demonstrates how this mode of writing, including a future anterior narrator that reflects on his or her past experiences as usable material for fashioning a durable but adaptive self, empowers subjects to exert greater control over their own self-fashioning. Students learn

sufficient empathy and agency from witnessing the struggles of these protagonists in order to

tell, and retell, their own stories.

INTRODUCTION

SUBJECTIVITY AND NARRATIVE

People create stories create people.

-Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments*

The word *schema* comes from the Greek word for shape or plan, and in cognitive theory,

it refers to a representation that describes the connections between ideas or prescribes certain

patterns of behavior. A visual analog for the *schema* is the map, and a textual analog for this kind

of representation might be genre. A plan for the creation of the individual subject in literature,

and the relationship of that subject to his or her world, has been laid out in, mapped, and in some

cases shaped by, the genre of the *Bildungsroman.* Over the last two and a half centuries, English

literature has broadcast the humanistic subject across the globe; the emerging de-centering and

multi-voiced subject of recent coming-of-age stories generated abroad and written back to the

metropolitan center is the harvest. To put it as succinctly as possible, I characterize *Bildung* as a

mode in contemporary literature that involves the marginalization of the subject from ideological

constructions of the self. The narrator of these novels also exhibits a marked awareness of his or

her own life experiences as the raw material, through reflection and creativity, for building a

non-identical self that can withstand the imposition of power from without itself. The

fundamental difference between autobiography and *Bildung* is the author's express

acknowledgement of the protagonist's self-construction as a fictive act. In the hands of post-

colonial and minority writers, this fictive act becomes of political and creative resistance, what

Gayatri Spivak calls "strategic essentialism" (*The Spivak Reader* 214).

1

John Frow ends his book *Genre* by describing a debate between critics and proponents of genre literacy over whether genres should be taught as models, norms that future writers should mimic, or whether teachers should avoid genre in order to emphasize the flexibility and fluidity of the text. He argues that this is a false dichotomy based on the assumption that textuality and structure are opposing principles. Frow further cites Terry Threadgold as suggesting that the interrelationships between texts can be thought of as a dialectical exchange between individual texts and the characteristics of a genre as it exists in a particular context. In other words, the study of genre can act as a kind of map that allows the reader to examine a topography that depicts the contextual differences between unique texts by allowing him or her to see how the symbols of genre construct relationships between different subjects, regions, and themes. By visualizing genre as a map uniting distant lands in a common visual representation, one can imagine changes in the context of generic symbols as a journey from one land to another or from one text to another. The journey of a genre such as the *Bildungsroman* from a limited cultural context in England to a global stage illustrates not only how literature communicates ideology between different cultural milieus, but also how this transition changes the ideology. The subject of the Anglophone *Bildungsroman,* the *Bildungsheld*, to borrow the German word for the protagonist of these texts, sets out on a journey and returns home forever changed.

This study treats the genre of the *Bildungsroman* as a map for charting the construction of identity in the English novel at the end of the nineteenth century to both Anglophone Africa and the African-American novel at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The theme of the subject's self-formation is a river swelling from Enlightenment humanism, saturated and obstructed by the sediment of European capitalist, imperialist, and anthropological discourses at the turn of the century, and pooling into regional bodies that construct the subject as a contested

site in post-colonial discourse. The *Bildungsroman* novel charts the confluences and distributaries of these ideologies of subjectivity. Rather than confuse the philosophy of subjectivity with the genre of the *Bildungsroman,* this introduction will discuss each in turn, and then subsequent chapters will illustrate correspondences and connections between the two.

Modern Philosophical Theories of Subjectivity

In the introduction to his book *Subjectivity*, Donald E. Hall provides a broad overview of philosophical trends in modernist thought when it comes to subjectivity. He begins his discussion with the contemporary belief that individuals can re-create their selves at will instead of existing as a fixed point in an immutable social or theological order, a shift in Western thinking about subjectivity that involves a gradual move from a "vertical" or hierarchical to a "horizontal" or negotiable mode of relationships within society (Hall 1). He further complicates the term subjectivity with a passage from Regenia Gagnier's book *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920*, in that she describes the self as a "subject to itself," a "subject to others," a "subject of knowledge" that is limited by the discourse of social institutions, and the subject as a "body," a physical form distinct from others and "closely dependent upon its physical environment" (Gagnier 8). This nuanced understanding of subjectivity is a development of modernity. Historically however, Continental philosophers, beginning with René Descartes, became interested in distinguishing the "subject" from the "object," and this philosophical preoccupation inspired authors of English literature trying to capture the nature of a subject's agency when forging his or her social identity and complications to that formation.

Untangling the process of self-creation from the subjection of marginalized groups continues to be a central concern in discussions of selfhood and agency, and this dissertation is primarily concerned in particular with how a genre of instrumental self-agency and socialization such as the *Bildungsroman* can generate counter-discourses to illustrate the coming-to-voice of oppressed subjects. A key idea that contributed to both the figuration of oppressed subjectivities as perpetuating their submission but also capable of liberation comes from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's description of the master and slave dialectic in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1806). Hegel's dialectic is immensely influential in the study of subjectivity, as he is the first theorist of the subject that historicizes the self, speculating that "the very foundations of the human condition could change from one historical era to another" (Singer 13). Central to the emergence of self-consciousness, Hegel suggests, is recognition by another, the creation of a self through social representation and acknowledgement. However, in his description of the master-slave dialectic, Hegel indicates that this validation is never inherently equal and always involves a struggle for dominance, and furthermore, once power is asserted by one subject over another, their relationship is temporary and unstable. Neither master nor slave gains sufficient lasting recognition from the other because any momentary resolution of their struggle involves the objectification of the oppressed. The tone that Hegel sets for modern conceptions of subjection starts out, therefore, as mired in conflict, oppression, and opposition, and this remains a part of Western thinking about subjectivity for at least a century.

In essence, while pre-modern conceptions of identity embedded the subject as a fixed point in a larger context and modern philosophers such as Descartes and Hegel divorced the individual from that context, Marx reconceives the subject as dialectically interacting with and developing through historical, social, and ideological institutions. Expanding upon Hegel's

theory of subjection, Karl Marx adds two contributions to his dialectic that are relevant to our discussion of subjectivity. First, where Hegel implies that the struggle between opposing forces can result in new modes of being, Marx sees individual identity as incorporated into politicized groups whose conflicts alter the social superstructure in his dialectical materialism. Second, Marx, in his "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), indicates there is a "process through that one gains a critical awareness of 'ideology,' of politically consequential, social belief that has been passed off as natural fact," and that as a result, there exists "the possibility that one can gain control over that that has controlled one's consciousness *by becoming conscious of that dynamic of control,*" a premise that pervades twentieth-century politicized subjectivity. A major preoccupation of twentieth-century theories of subjectivity in general is whether or not the individual subject can have a role in the struggle of the oppressed. In Marx there is an emphasis on strict binary opposition between the aggregate class identities and a deep suspicion of apolitical attachments and desires that might serve "covertly to reassert or justify the interests of the dominant group" (Marx, 1970). Subjects are ideologically programmed to regard imposed class relations as natural; Marx writes in a pamphlet entitled *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) that, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please…The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (Marx, 1964). In the first half of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud and other social scientists took up the study of this ideological programming.

To this study of subjectivity, Freud contributes the idea that familial context and erotic desire are both integral to the development of adult identity in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," emphasizing individual psychology and the influence of unconscious forces on conscious action, and Freud stresses that these repressed forces are persistent. The subject never entirely escapes

his or her past. Yet while Freud focuses discussions of subjectivity on the individual, his theory is agency involves the pursuit of social normalization rather than combating oppression. In contrast to Freud, the French existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, reject the "essentialism" implied by psychological theories of the unconsciousness, and instead stress the need for subjects to conscientiously work at bringing their selves into being. The existentialists do not necessarily deny the power of ideological forces that constrain the options open to the individual, but they are deeply suspicious of the determinism that seems to follow from theories of psychological or social subjection. The optimism inherent in Sartre and Camus's injunction to make meaning in the face of absurdity foreshadow the critical theories of Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser, who each respectively revised leading twentieth century theories of personal and social subjectivity.

Lacan's theories of subjectivity in effect replace Freud's prescriptive "normalization" with an exploration of the processes by that the norm is established and maintained. One of the bases of Lacan's theory of developmental human psychology is the desire for and the illusion of instrumental control over the self. In Lacan's understanding of human development, the human infant is confronted shortly after birth by an undifferentiated, threatening mass. Language gives this early subject a way of objectifying phenomena through naming. Language also asserts a social identity as a way of enforcing coherence and consistency upon the self. Key to later discussions of the *Bildungsroman* in this dissertation is Lacan's description of the future anterior as a process of asserting agency: "What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming" (Lacan 86). The *Bildungsroman* is the story one tells to show the process of becoming that culminated in what

one is. Suggestive of the existentialists' injunction to create meaning out of absurdity, Lacan's

tautological future anterior allows one to find authenticity in selfhood by asserting selfhood. In

the words of Chinua Achebe, "*People create stories create people*" (Achebe 1989: 162).

Furthermore, Lacan's emphasis on the fear of fragmentation as constitutive of subjectivity

explains why people cling to rigid ideologies and social structures, a theme picked up by Louis

Althusser.

James Kavanagh describes Althusser's understanding of ideology's relationship to the

subject:

> Ideology designates a rich "system of representations," worked up in specific material
>
> practices, that helps form individuals into social subjects who "freely" internalize an
>
> appropriate "picture" of their social world and their place in it. Ideology offers the social
>
> subject not a set of narrowly "political" ideas but a fundamental framework of
>
> assumptions that defines the parameters of the real and the self; it constitutes what
>
> Althusser calls the social subject's 'lived' relationship to the real (310).

Just as in Lacan's theory of subjectivity language gives the subject the illusion of control

over the objective other, in Althusser's theory, ideology gives the subject the illusion of

knowledge of totality, of what is real. Althusser identifies not only a series of "Repressive State

Apparatuses" or RSAs that coerce subjects through violence or the threat of violence, but also a

series of "Ideological State Apparatuses" or ISAs that represent the belief systems of a society as

natural and discourage subjects from challenging them. The subject is only free in the sense that

he or she may freely consent to the beliefs of the society and the dictates of the state. Just as

Lacan questions the nature of language, seeing signs not as expressed by the self but rather

constituting the self, Althusser questions the sovereignty of the self, and sees the subject not as productive of power, but as produced by power. The notion of agency seems to disappear completely in Althusser's theory of subjectivity.

The problem of agency is that any critique of the social totality is itself produced by and reproduces the powerful and repressive forces written about by Althusser. Foucault suggests that these discourses, his term for the combination of power and knowledge that shape subjects, are polyvalent, that they are not simply imposed "top-down," but instead circulate within the social totality, where discursive practices are appropriated and redeployed as counter-discourses. The theories of the Frankfurt School, and in particular Theodor Adorno, indicate how this appropriation and redeployment might take place. In *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno revises Hegel by arguing that Western philosophy, and Hegel's dialectic specifically, privileges concept over object, and so this kind of "identity thinking" places particular objects into classes or types, a process that ignores or suppresses the "non-identical," those things that are unique about the object being sublated or assimilated into the totality through classification. The non-identical is a "limit concept" that recognizes the limitations of conceptual, universal thinking. Adorno's "negative dialectics" foregrounds the object over the conceptual, reversing Hegel's dialectic. Adorno calls the non-identical the "indissoluble something." One might think of it as the cover of a book: an element of the society that is "of" the totality but not "in" it, that delineates the limits of the social body and can never be wholly incorporated (Golding). The "non-identical" element defies participation in the binary of the dialectic; art is the expression of this element that defies classification and will not pass from objective to conceptual status.[1]

---

[1] This dissertation begins with Oscar Wilde specifically because he valorizes self-formation as his true art, and his literary work as a byproduct. To paraphrase Wilde himself, his genius went

In his critique of the modernist *Bildungsroman*, Gregory Castle makes extensive use of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* to argue that the "failure" of the protagonist of the modern *Bildungsroman* is not due to a failure of the genre, but because:

> Those elements that demanded stability and predictable development in the classical Bildungsroman- harmonious identity-formation, aesthetic education, meaningful and rewarding social relations, a vocation- become problematic in the twentieth century. The modernist Bildungsroman carries on the struggle between desire and "great expectations," but the struggle no longer resembles the dialectical processes so elegantly narrativized in *Wilhelm Meister* (24).

In other words, modernist *Bildungsromane* so often "fail" because these narratives constitute, according to Castle, "a critique of the cultural conditions in which Bildung takes place and that deprive individuals of the freedom to think critically about their identities and how they relate to structures of power" (Castle 26). Castle identifies a "turn toward nonidentity" in the modernist Bildungsroman that reflects a turn against Victorian, Anglophone *Bildung* and a return to a foundational form of the genre more reminiscent of its Germanic roots. His assessment of the modernist *Bildungsroman* provides the basis for this dissertation's survey of the *Bildungsromane* of the Black Atlantic, and so it is necessary to consider the critical genealogy of the genre itself.

---

into self-formation, and only his talent into his literature. He sees nothing "natural" about self-development, but conceives of the *Bildungsroman* as an act of radical self-creation. There are those who read his work, *Dorian Gray* in particular, as a queer *Bildungsroman*, pointing out that the novel never describes Dorian's specific "sins," in that case one could argue that the text points to an indissoluble, unrepresentable self that is "of" the text but not "in" it.

Critical History of the *Bildungsroman*

In a chapter on the *Bildungsroman* for Blackwell's *Companion to the Victorian Novel*,
John R. Maynard describes genre as "a creation of criticism, though not necessarily of
professional literary critics. Whenever we identify some qualities that make two works of art
resemble each other and give the works possessing these qualities a name, we have produced a
genre. Any number can play; there is no limit to new suggestions. But, once *in* play, genre
becomes history; it becomes a part of culture" (179). He follows this by explaining that he will
render the term "bildungsroman" with a lowercase b, plural with an s, and without italics, to
reduce its foreignness and use it as an Anglicized word. Other writers and critics prefer the term
"coming of age" novel or one of the many variants of the term.[2] For my part, while I recognize
the artificial construction of a genre that has been appropriated from its ostensible cultural and
historical context, as described by John R. Maynard, I follow Tobias Boes in "Modernist Studies
in the *Bildungsroman*" by italicizing and capitalizing the term to underline a particular moment
around the turn of the twentieth century when a tradition with foreign antecedents and
encompassing a constellation of concerns centered on subject formation emerged into English
critical vocabulary. When further applying the term to postcolonial texts in English, it is entirely
appropriate to retain the signs of the term's foreignness and pretensions of universality and

---

[2] Maynard names a few of them: "novel of growing up, novel of growth, novel of education
(*Erziehungsroman*), novel of development (*Entwicklungsroman*), novel of self-development,
novel of socialization, novel of formation, novel of youth, novel of initiation, novel of paideai,
novel of adolescence, novel of culture, novel of self-culture" and etc. Critics often use these
terms interchangeably, but sometimes settle on a particular favored description that indicates
what might be considered a subgenre or specific set of concerns. Geta LeSeur, for example, in
Ten Is the Age of Darkness, indicates on the cover that the work covers the "Black
Bildungsroman" of North America and the West Indies, but her preferred term in the text is
"coming-of-age novel" that focuses more narrowly on the sexual maturity of the novels'
protagonists, separated into male and female subjects.

dominance when discussing the relationship between the genre as a construction of modern

Western culture and the postcolonial and female-centered texts that critics include in it.

The first recorded use of the term is in 1803,[3] in two lectures by the German critic Karl

Morgenstern in Estonia, when he applied it to describe Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*

(1795-6) and later Carlyle's translation of Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (Maynard

279). The term fell into obscurity until it was revived by German philosopher and sociologist

Wilhelm Dilthey as part of a biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1870, and then Dilthey

went on to popularize the term with a 1906 study called *Poetry and Experience* (Boes 231).

Dilthey's works weren't translated into English until the 1950's (Boes 231), but the term had

gained enough traction in English critical circles to merit inclusion in the 1910 edition of the

Encyclopedia Britannica (Maynard 280). The first English academic work on the genre,

according to Tobias Boes, is Susanna Howe's *Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen* from

1930.

The recent popularity of the term in English criticism stems, Boes suggests, from the

publication of Jerome Hamilton Buckley's *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to*

Golding in 1974. Buckley's objective in the text seems primarily to be finding continuities

between modernist texts by D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and William Golding and an older

literary tradition (231-2). Boes advances the argument posited by critics such as Jeffrey

Sammons and Frederick Amrine that the term *Bildungsroman* is of questionable critical value, as

---

[3] Boes indicates, citing 1961 research by Fritz Martini, that the lectures took place in 1819 and
1820. Despite the discrepancy between Maynard and Boes, what is clear is that the origins of the
term are obscure. It originates in the lectures of a Romantic critic and persists as a topic of
critical discussion among students of German literature for another fifty years before appearing
in Dilthey's work.

the "tradition" is largely the invention of Dilthey and Buckley (233). For fifty years following

Dilthey's *Poetry and Experience*, German critics used the term in a chauvinistic fashion to

celebrate the tradition of the *Bildungsroman* in contrast to "decadent" French and English novels

and promote German nationalism. After 1945, German literary critics tended to examine the

genre as an artifact of modern Germany's descent into fascism (Boes 232-3). Subsequent

German critics, those who haven't decried the term as being appropriated shortly after its

inception for nationalist propaganda, have preferred to restrict the use of the term to a handful of

German Romantic texts. English critics, on the other hand, following Buckley, have developed

broader taxonomic definitions of the term in order to apply it to a greater range of English texts.

Both Maynard and Boes posit that the flexibility and broad applicability of the genre, as it

appears in English literary critical discourse, provides opportunities for critics seeking to

examine new literature or re-examine canonical texts. Maynard points out critics of the

Bildungsroman are liable to utilize new language from discursive fields as diverse as

"psychology to educational theory to anthropology and sociology" to explain the development

and experiences of the subject (300). In his chapter on the genre, Maynard discusses how

feminist readings of female *Bildungsromane* by Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot highlight the

difficulty of their protagonists' experiences in obtaining a singular identity when they experience

the tension between their desire for an education and dominant Victorian models of female

adulthood (282-3). He also indicates that recent deconstructive readings of *Bildungsromane* by

Dickens reveal that the identities of the male protagonists of these novels are less coherent or

sustainable than critics have traditionally perceived them to be.[4] Maynard even looks at Pater's

---

[4] Maynard argues that David Copperfield, for example, needs his wife Agnes to solidify a
"tentative adult identity, put together with marine tar (or blacking polish), angel cake, and
murdstones" (283). Likewise, Maynard sees Pip from *Great Expectations* as never escaping his

Marius the Epicurean and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as canonical *Bildungsromane*

that suggest possible queer identity formation (285). Boes's survey of the genre is broken into

three parts: the first deals with the history of the genre, the second on feminist and historicist

modes of inquiry, and the third on recent colonial and post-colonial treatments. To discuss the

methodology behind this dissertation, this introduction will expand on these feminist, historicist,

and post-colonial approaches to the genre.

Critical Methodology: The Nineteenth-Century British Subject

The germinal historicist approach to the *Bildungsroman* is Franco Moretti's *The Way of*

the World. Moretti is interested less in the taxonomy of the genre and more in the genre as

cultural history. Drawing from the structure of Georg Lukács's *Theory of the Novel,* in that

Lukác distinguishes between the *Bildungsroman* and the "romance of disillusionment," Moretti

identifies a "classification principle" that organizes German and English novels of formation and

leads to stable resolutions, and a "transformation principle" that dominates French novels that

assert the value of change for its own sake (Boes 237). Lukác's interpretation of Marx developed

the latter's idea of reification, the process by that subjects are rendered into objects through the

structures of society, and his own interpretation of the *Bildungsroman* seems to conceive of the

subject as a product of historical processes and expressive of the emergence of class

consciousness, in Maynard's words, as "a marker for broader changes in society" (Maynard

287). Moretti sees the *Bildungsroman* genre's emphasis on youth as symbolic of modernity, and

analyzes its significance to Western European nations during the nineteenth century.

---

obsession for Estella, and his "rescue" of the similarly obsessed Miss Havisham as more of an
embrace of her self-destructive romantic desires (284).

One of the arguments this dissertation will pursue is the idea that reification or

subjection, to use a more theoretically neutral term than the Marxist one, is highly contingent on

the region and community the subject inhabits. Michel Foucault, for example, has described how

those subject to a particular institution become productive of power/knowledge, gaining agency

due to their status within the institution (e.g. the citizen of a nation is subject to the nation's laws

but gains certain rights). In turn, other subjects are objectified by an institution or institutions

granting them agency, voice, or representation (e.g. the colonial subject must abide by imperial

law and may be granted the trappings of citizenship, but in practice is not considered a subject by

the institution, and any (re)production of power/knowledge by the subject is opposed by other

agents of the institution). The application of power/knowledge is productive, in this case, not of

subjectivity but of difference, between the agents of the institution, those who have coherent

identities produced by the state, and Others outside of the institution but vulnerable to its

influence who are represented as having an oppositional identity.

This process in turn produces subjects who are in transition between being subjects with a

coherent identity that grants them agency to (re)produce the power/knowledge of the community

and those subjects who are becoming or transitioning from being objects of difference. This is

the condition of the modern subject, in any case.[5] Before the advent of racist ideologies that

calcified differences between metropolitan and colonial identities, narratives of post-colonial

British imperialism such as Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many

Lands* might promote an ideology of inclusion. Seacole's travelogue actually straddles the

transition between narratives highlighting the hope of colonial subjects that they would one day

---

[5] The rise of third-wave feminism and intersectional theory, as exemplified by the criticism of
bell hooks among others, complicates the relationship between favored and nonidentical
subjectivities, and will be discussed later.

be the equal of metropolitan subjects and narratives featuring the disappointment of colonial subjects encountering the racism of the metropole upon leaving their homeland for the imperial center. Prior to the breakdown of narratives promoting imperial inclusion, the central tension of the *Bildungsroman* was whether a subject could transition from existing outside the national polity as a youth or criminal to taking part in the business of the nation and the empire. The framework for the modern subject can be discerned in the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* in the opposition in that genre between being and becoming.

Moretti describes a dichotomy between the being and becoming in *The Way of the World*, and frames it in terms of youth and maturity. Youth and youthfulness each have a specific symbolic value in the context of Europe modernity. In *World,* Moretti argues that the youth of the protagonist chiefly characterizes the European *Bildungsroman* and acts as a symbol of modernity. The movement of the protagonist from country to city encapsulates the collapse of Europe's traditional agrarian society, and youth best symbolizes the adaptability of the modern subject while the move toward maturation involves reconciliation between the ideology of an emerging middle class and that of a vanishing aristocratic culture (4-5).[6] In his preface to the 2000 edition, Moretti explains that the scope of his study never extends beyond the male, middle class *Bildungsroman* because the working class protagonist of, for example, Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, never has, according to French historian Michelle Perrot, the "period of ease and self-formation that makes individual sociability and autonomous forms of expression possible," (x), and Moretti implies that this limitation extends to any group that lacks the privilege to dream.

---

[6] If one follows the changes in this symbolic value in later Anglophone *Bildungsroman* texts, the genre comes to a terminus (but not a termination) that allows it to move into disparate regional literatures, where the emphasis of the *Bildungsroman* generally shifts from maturity within the metropole to inclusion within the colonial state that ostensibly stands in opposition to the center.

Moretti's study terminates chronologically with George Eliot, but texts identified with the genre continue to appear after the turn of the century, both in and outside of Europe. The frustrated dreams of *Jude* and other tragic protagonists of the late modern *Bildungsroman* merit study because they export the transformed genre to the rest of the Anglophone world and broaden the genre's concerns, from class mobility and enfranchisement to colonial independence and then to the differentiated subject finding agency and voice within a striated global community.

This is a gradual process that can be charted by the regional vicissitudes of subjectivity in the *Bildungsroman.* When the *Bildungsroman* begins to center on failed aspirants to middle class status, this extends the appeal of the genre to emerging literatures in English in that the subject is also struggling to synthesize a disintegrating indigenous culture with an imposed colonial identity. When Moretti describes working class characters such as Jude as "no longer at home among his old fellow workers, but never accepted by the new bourgeois milieu, the hero suddenly sees the impossibility of his position… and drowns," the first few words seem to echo the title of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, and the description could apply to Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist of Achebe's novel, as easily as it could to Jude. The late modern "failures" of the genre translate into the virtues that recommend it as a symbolic form for expressing the struggles and energy of the non-European Anglophone world as it emerges from modernity. If identity in the early English *Bildungsroman* involved the middle class subject negotiating between agrarian traditions and aristocratic refinement, finding his or her way from a home in the country to a place in the city, identity in the later post-colonial *Bildungsroman* genre deals with the subject negotiating between abjection and lonely subalterity, the choice between accepting exile or searching in vain for a home one has lost. One can find the antecedents of the

16

orphan subject of the post-colonial *Bildungsroman* in a classical *Bildungsroman*, and the spatial criticism that is often applied to post-colonial texts has its antecedents in earlier formalist constructions.

Moretti describes the central tension of the genre upon that the *Bildungsroman* depends for its existence to be one between a teleological classification and an open-ended transformation.[7] He describes the novel of marriage as a model of classification that privileges happiness over freedom, and the novel of adultery, of liberation from traditional bonds, as a model of transformation that privileges freedom over marriage. Moretti associates the first with the English *Bildungsroman* novels and the second with Continental novels of emergence. Further, he argues that "the excessive development of one principle eliminates the opposite one: but in so doing, *it is the Bildungsroman itself that disappears…* However paradoxical it may seem, this symbolic form could indeed exist, not despite but *by virtue of its contradictory nature*" (9). The post-colonial *Bildungsroman* also relies on a paradoxical tension of being/belonging and becoming/independence, and it is this tension that sustains the genre.[8]

This study posits that the paradoxical tension that sustains later *Bildungsroman* novels is akin to the models Moretti describes, but can be adapted using Gilles Deleuze's distinction between state and nomadic spaces, described in "The Smooth in the Striated" in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The subject of the late modern and post-colonial *Bildungsroman* moves between

---

[7] My understanding of this "teleological classification" is that it refers to the overwhelming desire on the part of a protagonist to identify with the totality of a social class or nation. The "open-ended transformation" that Moretti refers to emerges from Enlightenment rationalism and emphasizes the liberation of the individual.

[8] The post-colonial tension between being and becoming can be understood as the impetus toward collective, political action and resistance to this on the part of the individual subject who recognizes its self as existing at the intersection between several different identities.

spaces that identify him or her as either occupying space, a state of existence not unlike classification in that the subject achieves 'belonging' in a place and subjecthood to the dominant national order, or passing through uncategorized space and between categorized spaces, a condition in that the subject leads a nomadic existence by necessity.[9] In this study, I do not use the terms "space" and "place" interchangeably, but will often refer to characters in a state of transformation passing through "space" or occupying a specific classificatory "place," sometimes within the same locality. In fact, it is the strong desire of the subject to move ceaselessly between space and place, to desire coherence and belonging in one instance and to lament the loss of freedom in the next, that distinguishes the young protagonist of the *Bildungsroman.* A sense of *unhomeliness*[10] haunts the modern colonial subject of the *Bildungsroman,* a lack of connection and a desire to move from a liminal space to one of belonging. However, at the same time, the nonidentical subject remains aware of the opportunities for self-creation that liminality provides.[11]

In *Atlas of the European Novel*, Moretti describes three "spaces" in the European *Bildungsroman*: the village, the provinces, and the capital city. These categories have their analogues in the post-colonial *Bildungsroman* in the sense that the regional capital of a colony,

---

[9] Reminiscent of Moretti's category of open-ended transformation.

[10] Homi Bhabha borrows Freud's concept of the "uncanny" and recasts it as *unhomeliness* in his essay "The World and the Home." To him, *unhomeliness* is when what is familiar to the subject becomes foreign by a gradual erosion of the line between home and the rest of the world. Due to the encroachment of repressive political forces, the subject loses a sense of a space that he or she can call his or her own.

[11] Movement from the margin to the center as a mode of development for a protagonist is most clearly illustrated in the *Bildungsromane* of the West Indies, as subjects migrate from their home country to London, but migration is a feature of most *Bildungsromane*: African subjects migrate from the country to either the city or the imperial capital, and African-American subjects travel to the North. Even *The Picture of Dorian Gray* features a protagonist that moves between metropolitan city and marginal areas like his country estate and the docks.

the space between the province and the imperial center, is often the site of both oppression and assimilation through colonial institutions and appropriation/resistance by colonized subjects, represented by mimicry and transculturation. The post-colonial subject struggles to find the agency for self-formation through moving between these spaces and negotiating with these forces. The pattern of these movements and negotiations mimics that of the protagonist of archetypal novels in the genre. The novel *Great Expectations* is a classic of the genre, and its hero, Pip, predicts the dilemma of the post-colonial *Bildungsroman* hero in his utilization of mimicry to move between class identities.

Pip's ambitions and movements in *Great Expectations* illustrate how this negotiation through movement applies to an archetypal *Bildungsroman* novel. As many critics have pointed out (Gilmore, House, Moynahan), Pip's desire to marry Estella both reflects and produces his hunger for middle class respectability, and this would identify the novel as one of Moretti's models of classification: Pip seeks entry into the middle class through marriage, and he hopes that his appropriation of middle class learning and manners will win him a bride to cement this status. However, Dickens problematizes London as a space for Pip. While he is able to imitate the affectations of the gentlemen he comes into contact with through Matthew Pocket's school and the young gentleman's club that he and Herbert Pocket belong, the Finches of the Grove, he is ambivalent over his adoption of London fashions when reminded of his provincial roots. One of the conditions of Pip's allowance through Jaggers is that he retains his childhood nickname, a constant reminder of his heritage. His desire to court Estella requires that he return to his home town, where Trabb's boy openly mocks Pip when the newly minted London gentleman puts on airs. Finally, Joe Gargery's visits to London make Pip feel beholden to his foster father and sense the gulf between his youthful identity and the individual he is becoming.

What aids Pip in reconciling his divided identities are his frequent trips to Wemmick's "Castle," located in Walworth, a space where Wemmick keeps his aged father in a humble cottage constructed to look like a castle, complete with moat, drawbridge, and cannons. Wemmick's affection for his father and whimsical aristocratic pretensions both contrast sharply from his business persona, that mimics that of his employer, Jaggers, who is aggressive, efficient, and a bit callous. While the business worlds and that of polite society are striated places, exclusive locations that Pip struggles to be a part of and that he tries to find a connection with, the domestic spaces created by Wemmick and by Herbert Pocket's marriage to Clara Barley are ones that make inclusion, play, rest, and fantasy possible.[12] Wemmick teaches Pip that it is possible to imitate a persona suited to life in the capital city while maintaining an authentic domestic life apart from it. It is through Pip's recognition of economic and domestic ties to both Magwitch and Joe that Pip's urbane expectations for himself reach a détente with his provincial origins.

While the journey and travails of Pip might bear some resemblance to that of the post-colonial subject struggling to find his or her identity, can the protagonist of the post-colonial *Bildungsroman* find an accord between his or her divided self by moving from place to space and back again? It is instructive to point out that even Pip's two halves are never fully reconciled; even in Dickens's revised ending of the novel, it is clear that Pip cannot marry Estella without sacrificing any hope for a domestic space in that he can enjoy a free and unfettered expression of

---

[12] Of course, these domestic spaces are constructed as places of refuge for male protagonists of the *Bildungsroman*, but for female characters, these domestic spaces are complicated by patriarchy. Even a dead brother and weak father, as in the case of *Nervous Conditions*, or an absent father and domineering mother, as in the case of Sapphire's *Push*, require the female protagonist to flee the home and seek out new spaces and new communities in which to find her voice and create a fully realized adult identity.

himself in the same way that Wemmick or Herbert does. The tension between the protagonist of

the *Bildungsroman*'s desire for a striated place, a place secured socially and economically

through reputation, and his or her need for a smooth space in that a more genuine self can be

indulged, drive the *Bildungsroman* while at the same time subverting any possibility of closure.

In the end (both of the endings that Dickens wrote), Pip does not marry Estella. Even in a classic

Bildungsroman such as *Great Expectations*, it is debatable whether Pip becomes a "fully

developed human being" at the end when he is still divided by conflicting desires.

Why is the search for identity in the *Bildungsroman* effectively ceaseless? Mikhail

Bakhtin suggests that the realistic novel of emergence depends on a sense of the protagonist's

formation reflecting that of the world around him or her: the world becomes a school in that the

subject learns who he or she is (Bakhtin 23-24). This appears to involve the ability of the subject

to contextualize itself in space and time, the ability to find its place by finding agency in how the

objects of its gaze relate to its own understanding of the world. Recognition of the familiar

human creativity behind one's surroundings reaffirms the subject's own self-creation. Bakhtin

provides an example of Goethe finding comfort in objects that have a necessary and visible

connection to the past (Bakhtin 32) while disliking the remnants, or 'ghosts' to use Goethe's

phrase, of an estranged past (Bakhtin 32-33). The objects that Goethe refers to are an efficiently

planned German village and ruins dating from the Roman Empire. The first strengthens Goethe's

connection to a living community while the second creates a sense of disjunction, of the

uncanny, of the familiar German countryside becoming strange.

In *The Way of the World,* Moretti describes how Goethe utilizes the raw material of

everyday life, of finding implicit connections that later take on meaning, to show growth in the

protagonist of *Wilhelm Meister.* The connection between the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place,

and the protagonist remains a crucial part of the *Bildungsroman* from *Wilhelm Meister*. The *homeliness* or *unhomeliness* of the subject's surroundings influences the subject's own sense of becoming and empowerment in so far as they present a necessary, visible, and creative link between the subject and his or her place and time. The position of the subject in the *Bildungsroman*, and also that of the post-colonial novel, is always one of displacement and alienation coupled with a desire to find connection and belonging, but the obstacle to achieving this belonging is the inauthenticity of imposed difference. Narratives of progress, health, education, civilization, and inclusion, ideologies are ones that can coexist harmoniously and provide the subject with agency and identity. These narratives may also generate counter-narratives of regression, sickness, ignorance, savagery, and exclusion that, heightened to the level of an existential threat (if the subject resists, the community may rescind its status), can create intense anxiety in the subject. The subject is far from home, in Keats' words, like Ruth standing amid the alien corn, forced to deal with exigencies that take one farther and farther from a sense of necessary and visible belonging and connection.

The *Bildungsroman* operates as a generic category in that the subject develops through forging connections between itself and its surroundings even as these surroundings become complicated through movements from simple, vertical relationships (e.g. family, heritage) to complex, horizontal relationships (e.g. peers, schooling, professions, social groups). The disruption between the operation of the genre in England prior to the close of the nineteenth century and how its structure and symbols are employed in the post-colonial novel occur when there is an awareness of the ways that contradictory dominant ideological forces are imposed on the developing subject and interfere with its identity and agency. Self-formation in these novels

thus becomes incomplete or contingent upon negotiation between an ambivalent subject that desires coherence and agency, belonging and freedom.

While the European *Bildungsroman* sees this conflict as resolved through time, as the subject moves from young to maturity, the post-colonial *Bildungsroman* sees this conflict as a struggle in space, between the imperial center and the colonial periphery. The irony of the *Bildungsroman* in general is that while it celebrates becoming and the production of the subject, holding out the hope of social mobility, inclusion, and agency to those outside the dominant institutions and ideologies at its heart, it also (re)produces difference between the subject and the Other, threatening the resistant subject with social dissolution or exile.

The context of the Anglophone *Bildungsroman* involves the interaction, borrowing Immanuel Wallerstein's designations, between places and spaces associated with the core of imperial power and a given peripheral region. The far-flung British Empire, spreading its language to the Americas, the Caribbean, and the shores of Africa and Asia, embodies the common, trackless space linking together those places where these texts are written. The movement of emerging characters in the *Bildungsroman* highlights moments of interpellation between imperial core and regional periphery. Edward Said's term "structures of attitude and reference" is useful here, as is his method of demonstrating how "structures of location and geographical reference appear in the cultural languages of literature…sometimes allusively and sometimes carefully plotted, across several individual works that are not otherwise connected to one another or to an official ideology of 'empire'" (*Culture and Imperialism* 52). In the *Bildungsroman* novel, the ideological valences of different locations complicate the emergence of the protagonist. How different texts represent these locations from the same region, how the subjects of different texts negotiate these spaces, and how the identification of these subjects

23

with new communities and new political subjectivities are the main issues this study will address.

Critical Methodology: The Post-Colonial Subject

The *Bildungsroman* genre is the perfect form for expressing the struggles of the emerging postcolonial subject. What Simon Gikandi has said in reference to the post-colonial novel applies also to the *Bildungsroman* genre as a whole: "it seeks to understand the genealogy of what we have...labeled the divided localities of postcolonial identities, caught between the doctrines of a 'natural home' and the grand narratives of the nation-state" (211-212). The internal struggle within the modern European subject moving from the country to the city is in many ways like that of the colonized intellectual; the transition between space and place represents an opportunity and a loss, empowerment and subjection, and inclusion and exile. The condition of the subject, both post-modern and post-colonial, is one of rediscovering one's identity in a history and a locality that has become strange. In addition, post-colonial criticism, like post-modernist criticism, tends to be suspicious of grand narratives in general. The modern European *Bildungsroman*, in so far as modern examples of the genre involve narratives of successful self-formation that evolve in tandem with grand ideological narratives rather than despite them, is undermined by the counter-narratives of post-colonial *Bildungsroman* novels that depict a subject at odds with grand narratives of national exceptionalism, social progress, masculinity/femininity, and enlightenment.

One dynamic this study considers is how imperialism, as a constellation of related ideologies, may present obstacles to this process of self-formation. In *The Intimate Enemy*, Ashis Nandy describes how imperial ideology foregrounds differences between colonizer and

colonized, emphasizing the most aggressive and callous elements in the culture of the former while imposing an opposing identity on the latter. Successful resistance to this imperial ideology rests on the subject rejecting the dichotomy between hyper-masculine colonizer and femininized colonized and embracing hybrid and neglected aspects of both cultures, "hosting within oneself the otherness of others" (Nandy 119-120). A nascent conception of the fluidity of social class and citizenship, coupled with more sharply defined notions of gendered labor divisions, formed the basis for the civilizing mission of the British Empire, and the ideology of this civilizing mission informed the deployment of political, religious, and educational institutions in the colonies. Ground-breaking studies of gender by critical theorists such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick that question the centrality of gender in identity have provided the basis for *Bildungsromane* that recognize a range of subjectivities that can be both hybrid and contingent. With the deconstruction of essentialist, aggregate subjects that privilege the categorical over the particular, the favored model for self-formation in the *Bildungsroman* around the turn of the Twenty-First Century has moved from the "either/or" of oppressor and oppressed and colonizer and colonized to the "both/and" of marginalized subjects "coming to voice" (*Talking Back* 12).

In light of this deconstructive shift in thinking about subjectivity, this study splits the consideration of African and African-American literature into two parts: nineteenth and twentieth-century novels of oppressed subjects struggling against colonialism and modernism, and late twentieth-century and twenty-first century novels, written predominantly by women of color. This separation charts a profound movement from thinking about subjects as essentialist and oppositional to a consideration of the subject as the site of intersecting discourses.

Outline of the Dissertation

In broad strokes, this dissertation tries to answer the question of whether modernist experiments with the European genre of the *Bildungsroman* by oppressed people allowed them to create effective counter-discourses against repressive ideologies associated with colonialism, racism, and misogyny. The first chapter, "Late Nineteenth-Century British Subjects, Creative Individualism, and What Is Left Unsaid," deals predominantly with Oscar Wilde's gothic *Bildungsroman, The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The focus is on how the totalizing discourse of late Victorian ethical socialization crashes into Wilde's celebration of aesthetically creative self-creation. The result is a subject defined by the omissions, ellipses, and aporias of the text, but also the institution of a counter-discourse of subjectivity framed by nonidentical qualities that appropriates and recirculates the language of the genre of self-formation. Wilde's use of the gothic to subvert the *Bildungsroman's* themes of subjection/identity, social representation, and chronological development undermines the British imperial project as a whole.

The second chapter, "Voices from the Margin of the Empire: Colonized *Bildungsromane* of Nigeria and Kenya," discusses the troubled figure of the modern British subject in Africa and moves on to analyze themes of assimilation and resistance in the works of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel, *Weep Not, Child.* These texts are modern because they do not culminate in the adulthood of their subjects, but instead dwell on aborted development, echoing the disappointing post-colonial period in that the neocolonial reality does not equal the dreams of national independence.

The third chapter, "Voices from the Margin of the Nation: Feminist *Bildungsromane* in Zimbabwe and Nigeria," revisits African literary modernism's troubled relationship with post-

colonialism and how feminism influences these narratives of feminine self-development. While

texts such Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's *Purple*

Hibiscus conclude with protagonists who have lost some childhood agency with their

development into adults, there is still a sense of a coming-to-voice[13] despite the injustice of their

experiences.

The fourth chapter, "Voices of Bondage and Segregation: The Modern African-American

Bildungsroman," examines several African-American texts from the early nineteenth century to

the mid-twentieth century, with a special focus on modernist experimentation with the

Bildungsroman form in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the*

Mountain. Unlike the African *Bildungsroman*, the disillusionment of the protagonists in these

novels is not grounded in the failed promises of nationalism, but in the incomplete struggle to

overcome the legacy of American racism through identification with political or religious

liberation.

The fifth chapter, "Voices of the Silenced and Abused: Feminist African-American

Bildungsromane," observes how early novels of self-formation by African-American women

featured obstacles based not only on racial but gendered oppression and how contemporary

feminist novels by women of color, including Nella Larsen's *Passing,* Alice Walker's *The Color*

Purple, and Edwidge Danticatt's *Breath, Eyes, Memory,* address this history.

---

[13] bell hooks uses this term in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* to refer to breaking one's silence as an affirmation of struggle. I read her conception of coming-to-voice more as a commitment to fighting against oppression than it is a celebration or exercise of agency and empowerment.

CHAPTER ONE

LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH SUBJECTS

In her introduction to *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900*, Nancy Armstrong begins with an anecdote relating how Sir Joshua Reynolds who, when tasked in 1780 with painting the portrait of a Master Bunbury, a fidgety young aristocrat, told the boy wondrous stories to keep him still. The painting captures Bunbury's rapt expression, with a "slightly open mouth and wide-eyed stare" (1). There is a remarkable parallel scene in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: while Basil Hallward prepares to finish the eponymous portrait, Lord Henry Wotton keeps Dorian amused by extolling the virtues of self-development, and Basil becomes "conscious…that a look had come into the lad's face that he had never seen there before…For nearly ten minutes [Dorian] stood there, motionless, with parted lips, and eyes strangely bright" (58). [14]

Armstrong's basic argument is that the artist, in Reynolds's case, and the author of the English novel both engender interiority in the subject. Individuality is an invention of modernity. The creation of Dorian as a subject through the medium of art (spoken discourse *and* visual art) certainly appears to be what is happening to Dorian Gray in this scene of the novel, as Lord

---

[14] "Bunbury" became the name of Algernon's fictional relative that he used to avoid undesirable social engagements in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Considering Wilde's stint as a critic of the visual arts and his friendship with artists like Whistler (Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* 78-83), it is certainly possible that Wilde was familiar with the anecdote about Reynolds and Bunbury.

Henry's words encourage Dorian to cultivate his inner life above all else, and Basil Hallward devises an image that registers the internal change that comes over Dorian's features under Lord Henry's influence. This image functions as a mirror in that Dorian becomes a spectator of the formation of his own self, first as imagined by Lord Henry and Basil Hallward, and then as it degenerates under the effects of time and Dorian's own experiences. While Armstrong imagines most Gothic novels as forcing a defensive reformulation of the modern individual, I argue that Wilde's novel engages with a separate colonial tradition of *Bildung* that not only critiques and eventually resists institutions of subject formation (e.g. standardized education, the *Bildungsroman*), but understands these ideological apparatuses as alien and repressive. The subject of the colonial *Bildung* is chameleon-like, partaking of a form of individualism that adapts to an image of the unmarked subject while still carrying an element of difference. The protagonist of this tradition is marked by a double consciousness that comes to pervade much of modern literature.[15] This marginalized double, originating on the periphery and performing a *Bildung* of subjection and nonidentification at odds with the modern individual, is later (re)produced by postcolonial narratives of self-development that gradually move from tragic to liberatory. Before this doubled subject became a recognized feature in English literature, the character of the marginalized or doubled subject often appeared uncanny to metropolitan

---

[15] Paul Gilroy deals with this extensively in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, and the issue will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. For the time being, it will suffice to say that double consciousness predates Wilde and appears in the writing of W.E.B. Du Bois. I use Wilde as an example of how this feature of the divided subject crept into one of the dominant genres of metropolitan English literature, fundamentally changed the nature of the Anglophone *Bildung,* and then returned to the colonies as a tool of critique and liberation.

audiences; voices from the margins of empire expressed themselves through the Gothic and the sensational, seeming to speak from the past rather than from the colonies.[16]

The doubled subject of Dorian Gray in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* emerges as a credible character from the interplay between Paterian self-development and the Gothic. The doubled subject at the confluence of these two genres in *Dorian Gray* highlights several features of the novel's peculiar *Bildung*. First is the establishment of a specular self, divided between subjectivity and self-image, in which the subject is able to watch his own development from the perspective of a separate entity. Second is the subject's displacement outside normative domestic spaces that forces a reevaluation of the authenticity of identity, the creation of an unresolved aporia central to the novel that makes it impossible to read the protagonist's degeneration as either purely sensational or purely moralistic punishment. Dorian, as a subject, tries to destroy the image of the other self he sees in the picture and ends up committing suicide. Dorian's destruction of his other self generates contradictory readings of the novel as either a fantasy or a morality fable. Finally, Dorian's sins suggest a category of masculinity that both foregrounds and occludes male-male desire between Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry.

Robert Louis Stevenson previously made the doubled subject the centerpiece of his Gothic novel of degeneration, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Clausson), and Wilde appears to borrow elements from the same Gothic tradition in introducing his own protagonist. Rather than overwhelming the narrative however, these Gothic elements gradually peel away to explore the interiority of the protagonist. The first two chapters establish Lord Henry as an aristocratic seducer or vampire based on stock characters of various Gothic

---

[16] The best-known examples of this are Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

romances.[17] Whatever seductive Gothic charge Lord Henry exudes at the start of the novel, however, eventually inheres in the portrait, and the unexplained magic of the portrait is secondary to its creation of a divided subject.

Before introducing Dorian and Lord Henry, Basil laments what might become of Dorian if he falls under Lord Henry's influence. Dorian does indeed embrace Lord Henry's hedonistic doctrine and makes it the cornerstone of his self-cultivation, yet the evidence of this influence that Basil dreads remains hidden from the artist due to a magical phenomenon, the transference of Dorian's soul into Basil's portrait, that ages and decays, while Dorian's body gains the fixed youthfulness of the portrait. After listening to Lord Henry's paean to youth while sitting for his portrait, Dorian sees his youth and beauty reflected within its surface and bursts out in a paroxysm of grief, murmuring, "How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June… If it were only the other way!" (65). While this bargain with unknown powers[18] does not yield tangible results until much later in the novel, readers can trace the introduction of the Gothic story back to this moment in the novel (Craft 114). What should a reader make of this intrusion of the Gothic into the conventional *Bildungsroman*? Two issues should be considered with the introduction of the portrait. The first issue is what role the portrait plays in the construction of the

---

[17] Montoni from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* springs to mind, but more prosaic examples, such as Robert Lovelace from *Clarissa*, may have provided material that contributed to this image.

[18] The 1945 film adaptation of the novel actually inserts a sculpture of the Egyptian goddess Bast into Basil's study and implies that the deity grants Dorian his wish for reasons of its own. This suggests that in at least this adaptation of the story, the supernatural elements are attributed to a source both ancient and foreign to England.

self, and the other is the function of the Gothic genre within the Victorian literary project of defining the limits of individualism as a whole.

The text of *Dorian Gray* compares Dorian's portrait to a mirror. Kathleen Woodward, in her discussion of ageism in Western culture, "Decrepitude, the Mirror Stage, and the Literary Imagination," inverts Lacan's mirror stage to describe the psyche of the elderly specular self:

> [W]hile the child contrasts a fragmented body with the mirrored whole, for the elderly adult to compare an image of disintegration with an inner sense of wholeness he or she must construct an image of an earlier unity called youthfulness that is a necessary prerequisite to an imagined future of increasing fragmentation (59).

Kay Heath applies Woodward's notion of the mirror stage to *Dorian Gray* in "In the Eye of the Beholder: Victorian Age Construction and the Specular Self," and further notes that Dorian is unusual because he fears aging at an extraordinarily young age. He writes, "Even at the age twenty, Dorian begins to worry about a future when he will be dropped as both an aesthetic and romantic object" (Heath 33-34).

Dorian, as the object of both Basil Hallward's and Lord Henry's admiration, becomes the image of youthfulness and beauty the older men desire. Understanding the value the older men place on his youth, Dorian dreads the loss of his vernal beauty not necessarily because he reciprocates Basil and Lord Henry's affections, but because he desires their continued objectification. Their recognition, and perhaps their rivalry, has given him a coherent identity in society. The story of Dorian's family that Lord Henry uncovers in chapter 3, the description of Dorian's grandfather Kelso, and the later glimpses of Dorian's residence indicate a childhood of alienation and loss, implying intellectual and emotional neglect. It suffices for now to say that

Dorian's anxiety over bodily degeneration signals his desire to resist the disintegration of his

newfound self and to seize control over his own self-development.

In "Come See About Me: The Enchantment of the Double in *The Picture of Dorian*

Gray," Christopher Craft also employs a modification of Lacan's mirror stage to explore the

inception of the ego and relates it directly to what he calls the "mini-*Bildungsroman*" of the

novel's first two chapters (121). In a "perverse, postmodern twist that privileges the replica over

its 'original,'" (ibid) Lord Henry identifies the portrait as "the real Dorian Gray- that is all,"

(*Dorian Gray*, 67) implying that Dorian's body is the reflection and the image is the authentic

self. Craft argues that this is indeed what happens, transforming Dorian into a subject whose

further cultivation consists of obsessive contemplation of the differences between two

reflections, one of his arrested surface appearance, and one of his devolving internal state:

> In translating the erotics of specular identification into Faustean pact, Dorian becomes the
>
> eponymous character whose narrative Wilde goes on to tell; that is, Dorian 'himself'
>
> comes to embody the picture of Dorian Gray. *This* Dorian constitutes not only the
>
> narrative's definitive sexual object (everybody wants him), but also its definitively
>
> perverse sexual subject: the one who extends his desire toward external objects only so he
>
> may then watch it coil back upon the image he loves to watch watching him. For Dorian,
>
> object-cathexes themselves sponsor the multiple mirror relations that constitute Dorian's
>
> only lasting passion (121-2).

Throughout the novel, Dorian continues to enact the competing and incompatible desires

of Basil Hallward and Lord Henry that are inscribed in his soul. Outwardly, his body becomes an

object that reflects the desires of those who gaze upon it. Craft describes Basil's desire for

Dorian as "an extraordinary erotic perturbation…and one that Basil must struggle to convert into artistic production according to the Platonic mandate in which elite Victorian males were routinely schooled" (117). This use of the "idealizing eroto-cognitive itinerary established by Plato" to sublimate desires into art by converting bodies as objects of desire into an idealized type, prescribes a course that allows erotic desires to be transferred to the image of the body, dissociated from their particular object, and manipulated. It accounts for the mechanism that permits the images of marginalized groups to signify within the arts during the Victorian period categories of difference from unmarked, privileged subjects.[19] Craft maintains that Wilde was "deeply suspicious of the deracinated sublimatory motive driving thought and desire throughout the Platonic schedule" and suggests *Dorian Gray* cites and subverts Plato's prescription for sublimation, point-by-point (117). While it may be too much to read Dorian as a part of one of these marginalized groups, or even as an unequivocal queer subject as Craft seems to read him, I argue those things that pre-date Dorian's identification with his portrait in Basil's studio, his entire history as related to Lord Henry in chapter 3 and by Dorian himself in chapter 11, exist in what Craft calls the *scotoma*, the "blindness that vision needs in order to see at all" (128); this raw material of Dorian's birth and heritage is almost entirely left out of his *Bildung* and yet embeds him in the narrative as a credible subject. These things are mostly smoothed out of existence during Dorian's initiation into high society.

---

[19] Bram Dijkstra, in *Idols of Perversity*, traces evidence of growing misogyny in the visual arts over the course of the century and even implicates Wilde in this misogyny, calling *Salome* a "call for gynecide" (396). Elaine Showalter also sees a "subtext [of] escalating contempt for women" in the aestheticism Wilde describes in the character of Lord Henry, who mouths "a series of generalizations about the practicality, materiality, grossness, and immanence of women" (Showalter 176). While Dijkstra touches only briefly upon racial images in *Idols*, H.L. Malchow explores literary images that he reads besides depictions of race by Fuseli, by Rubens, and in contemporary periodicals.

To find out more about Dorian, Lord Henry visits his uncle Lord Fermor, the son and

secretary of a former English ambassador to Madrid, and asks about Dorian's mother. Fermor

gives Lord Henry a thumbnail impression of Dorian's parents and grandparents, relating how

Dorian's beautiful and well-connected mother married a penniless soldier overseas, and shaking

his head at the match, complains about Lord Henry's older brother marrying an American,

saying, "Why can't these American women stay in their own country?" (74). This juxtaposition

of the two marriages associates the alliance between Dorian's aristocratic mother and soldier

father with Dartmoor's proposal to a foreigner. In addition, the death of Dorian's soldier father in

Belgium, as well as his grandfather Kelso being named after a town in Scotland, mark his

heritage as deriving from the margins of the English nation. These background details seem

benign enough, but as Dorian later strolls through the halls of the picture-gallery in his country

estate, he wonders if his vices, that drive him down to the docks near Blue Gate Fields, the haunt

of foreign sailors and the working classes, are inherited from his ancestors (175). One ancestor in

particular, George Willoughby, who is metonymically linked to Dorian's corpse by the rings on

his fingers, is described in vaguely racialized terms as "saturnine and swarthy" and is identified

as a "macaroni of the eighteenth century," a forerunner of the dandy that lived a hedonistic

lifestyle and affected Continental dress. The portraits in Dorian's Selby Royal estate are mirrors

as well, hinting that his nameless sins are atavisms connected to his gothic heritage. It is

tempting, if one were to read the novel autobiographically, to find parallels between Dorian's

suppressed gothic past and Wilde's suppression of his own Irish accents at Oxford (Ellmann 38),

and to associate the return of this repressed self with the gothic elements in the novel.

In the emergent modern English *Bildungsroman,* the Gothic becomes less of a distinct

genre that complements the novel of development and more an essential element that haunts the

childhoods of these protagonists. Gregory Castle, in *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman*, describes the Anglo-Irish gothic tradition as a code expressing a kind of imaginative exile that resulted from "a displacement of development onto different, non-Irish social and cultural spaces" (Castle 130).[20] According to Castle, these elements of Gothicism in the *Bildungsroman* by Wilde (and, Castle adds, Joyce) are an essential part of modernist resistance to the British institutionalization of self-cultivation.[21] To Castle, the Gothic signifies aspects of the self that cannot be integrated or expelled through socialization. In *How Novels Think,* Nancy Armstrong sees sensational literature in general, and the Gothic in particular, as a form of challenge to the self-enclosure of the individual that leads to the reauthorization of individualism; information and sensations from the undifferentiated aggregate- foreigners, the masses- transgress the boundaries of individuality and threaten to dissolve the self, causing the individual to recoil in fear. Eruptions of the Gothic in the Anglophone tradition often signal anxiety over the integrity of the self and provoke a subsequent renegotiation of the limits of individualism.[22]

---

[20] A frequent feature of the *Bildungscheld,* the protagonist of the novel of self-development, is that he or she is an orphan. There are many examples of disinherited or exiled characters in the Gothic whose experiences are analogous to the orphaned *Bildungsheld*, and novels like *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* appear to effectively combine elements of both genres in their protagonists.

[21] Castle writes of a dream-like sequence from *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, "Like the portrait of Dorian Gray, the birdgirl represents to the young artist an otherworldly aspect of himself, one excluded or disavowed by the dialectics of socialization that he has repudiated" (182).

[22] Armstrong discusses several examples of how this dialectic between individual and aggregate negotiates the fraught relationship between self and society. She outlines how the excessive individualism of protagonists in novels by Defoe, Austen, Scott, Shelley, et al provoke feelings of both pleasure and repugnance in audiences ambivalent about the outer limits of and lines between categories like Englishness and humanity, femaleness and femininity, and racial monogeneity and polygeneity in the modern novel. Armstrong sees the Gothic as a "necessary" genre that "equates the pleasure of escaping the limits of individualism with the loss of humanity itself" and that "ultimately compels us to defend individualism at any cost," thus it "gave form to

Castle's survey of the modernist *Bildungsroman* appears to dovetail nicely with

Armstrong's understanding of how Althusser saw ideology displace violence as a civilizing

force, by concealing a logical contradiction within the idea of the social contract behind a

narrative of self-development.[23] Armstrong describes Rousseau as inventing a modern individual

who cannot be coerced, but must instead choose to become subject to a contract between

individuals in common society (Armstrong 30-31). Castle sees the Germanic tradition of *Bildung*

as a spiritual-aesthetic one that gives way to an English *Bildung* of harmonious socialization. In

other words, the Germanic *Bildung* exists in a Romantic framework in that the *Bildungsheld,* the

protagonist of the *Bildungsroman*, pursues a teleological, spiritual self, transitions under the

influence of Wilhelm von Humboldt into a search for a social self that expresses the spirit of the

nation, and eventually develops into the English *Bildung* under Carlyle and Arnold that proposes

---

the modern individual and continues to defend and update it" (Armstrong 135). I suggest that
(re)appearances of the Gothic signal renegotiation of individualism's limits and thus require
revisions in dominant narratives of self-development.

[23] Armstrong sees the power of modern secular morality as coming from and authorizing "those
works of fiction where morality appears to emanate from the very core of an individual, as that
individual confronts and opposes socially inculcated systems of value…For it to be missing in
some, the moral sense has to be present in most. This was not always true" (Armstrong 27).
Armstrong describes this source of values in the individual as a supplement, an additive so
different from and incompatible with the host category (in this case the individual) that it forces
the reorganization of the category. This modern reorganization of the individual is necessary
(according to Althusser) in order to imagine a state in that free subjectivity is not at odds with
political subjection. To Rousseau, what authorizes an enlightened secular government is the
consent of its free citizens who ensure their own freedom from subjection by governing
themselves. Rousseau abandons the logic of contractual exchange (i.e. the "social contract")
when shifting from social to personal theory and figures the new type of individual described
above, a "bad subject" or Misfit who opposes socially inculcated systems of value. The inherent
logical contradiction of the modern individual is that he or she is "not only a novelistic rendering
of Rousseau's new man, by nature inclined to self-government, but also the embodiment of
Althusser's bad subject, by nature incapable of being 'hailed'" (Armstrong 31). Narratives of
self-development, in that the protagonist resists subjection and elects to discipline him or herself
to assimilate to society, make this new category plausible. My understanding of the divided
subject is that it actively critiques those ideological apparatuses from that it derives.

that educational institutions can affect social mobility and economic integration as a means of achieving identity.

This is certainly a moment of transition for the novel of self-development, but it does continue to exist in some fashion, and there are common intertextual thematic elements to these novels that exist independent of language, nation, or ethnicity. Just as Linda Dowling perceives Decadence as emerging from a crisis brought on by a revolution in philology that reformulated language as autonomous from human values and experience (Dowling xi-xii), the gothic *Bildung* of Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggests a subject autonomous in its mastery of self-cultivation, but vexed by social identity and nation. The novel thus presents a critique of narratives of self-development that leads to a revision of the novel of self-development featuring a more inclusive, de-centering subject that, I would argue, circulates to other regional literatures. Critics such as Franco Moretti, in *Way of the World*, perceive this moment when the destabilized *Bildungsroman* stretches to accommodate different subjectivities as its point of terminus.[24] German specialists, such as Wilhelm Dilthey, often see the genre as a nationalist form from the Romantic era, and have tended to exclude most texts as fitting their criteria for inclusion (Boes) while some postcolonial critics have either favored an alternate term, such of "novels of

---

[24] Jed Etsy argues that Moretti fails to explore the symbolic function of nationhood in the *Bildungsroman*; while Moretti contends that the *Bildung* narrative managed modernization and the disruptions of capitalism by domesticating subjects that aspired to middle-class wealth and power, and that "youth" is symbolic of these revolutionary forces that expire with "maturity," Etsy suggests that the symbolic counter-trope of adulthood is "nationhood," the finished form of modern society. In "Virginia Woolf's Colony" from *Modernism and Colonialism*, places *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in a class of European novels that "cast colonial underdevelopment in terms of frozen or stunted youth," writing that the novel "inverts the aging process, yielding a protagonist whose endless youth anticipates another fin de siècle Orientalist tale, Kipling's *Kim*" (72). In incorporating Wilde into his argument on how Woolf challenges colonialism through her subversion of the *Bildungsroman* in her novel *The Voyage Out*, Etsy supports this dissertation's argument that modernist *Bildungsromane* provided post-colonial writers with generic tools to write back against imperialist discourse.

transformation," and others, such as Jamaican critic Geta LeSeur, have continued using the German term while disowning any kinship with European genres (Stein). Regardless of the genre's specific name, the preoccupation with subjectivity and development persists and proliferates in post-colonial literatures around the world.

Some critics prefer to see later English *Bildungsromane* such as *Dorian Gray* as an unsuccessful hybrid of several different genres. Nils Clausson writes that "*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is neither governed by a single unifying genre nor dispersed intertextually (and unoriginally) among multiple heterogeneous ones, but rather is disjunctively situated between two conflicting genres, each of that is related to one of the two antithetical literary and cultural discourses that the novel engages but cannot successfully integrate: namely, self-development (including what we would today call 'sexual liberation') and Gothic degeneration" (Clausson 342). Contrary to Clausson and following Nancy Armstrong and Gregory Castle, I argue that the novel employs these antithetical discourses to engineer an immanent critique of the *Bildungsroman* as a normative, regulative form.

Dorian Gray generates a critical dialect between aesthetic and ethical self-cultivation, in that the elements of subject-formation that cannot be governed and remain unacknowledged in the novel (the presence of male-male desire, Anglo-Irish anxiety of exile, and criminal vice), undermine this process and lead to the degeneration of the subject. What is left on the floor of Dorian Gray's hidden schoolroom is a Gothic remnant that cannot be identified beyond the rings on the corpse's fingers. The failure to incorporate this unrepresentable self into Dorian's development announces an aporia in a genre of self-development that depends on harmonious socialization (typically involving marriage or the discovery of a vocation), a necessary disruption of narratives of self-actualization that opens the door for the modern "failed" *Bildungsromane* of

39

Hardy, Lawrence, Joyce, and Woolf, and this phenomenon in the later English *Bildungsroman*

has been covered by critics such as Patricia Alden, Gregory Castle, and others. What has

received less attention than the modernist fiction of development in British literature is how this

fin-de-siècle *Bildung* generated a critical alternative to the English form of *Bildung* that preceded

it and how post-colonial *Bildungsroman* novels appropriate and develop the form to respond to

British modernism.[25] This alternative arises from Wilde's challenge to Matthew Arnold in "The

Critic as Artist," announcing that the job of the critic is not to, as Arnold put it, "see the object as

in itself it really is," but rather to see the literary object as it is *not*. His adoption of the Gothic to

represent subjective modes of alterity in *Dorian Gray*, in turn, challenges the assumption of the

social realist *Bildung* novel to provide an untroubled representation of interiority and its role in

modeling the ethical formation of the subject.

The sources of Wilde's interest in *Bildung* are the works of Walter Pater and Karl

Huysmans's *A Rebours*. In his biography of Wilde, Ellmann describes Wilde as being fascinated

by the opposition of the aesthetic and the ethical during his youth. This is reflected in his early

admiration for Ruskin and Pater:

> Ruskin declared in 1883 that the growing habit of calling 'aesthetic' what was only 'pigs-
>
> flavouring of pigs' wash' argued a 'moral deficiency'… Though both Ruskin and Pater
>
> welcomed beauty, for Ruskin it had to be allied with good, for Pater it might have just a
>
> touch of evil. Pater rather liked the Borgias, for example. Ruskin spoke of faith, Pater of

---

[25] Jed Etsy, in *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, explores how the *Bildungsroman* changes during the Age of Empire, but the lion's share of the book's focus is on novels of self-development written by modernists within the United Kingdom. A single chapter considers Dominican-born Jean Rhys and Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*, that features an Anglo-Irish subject.

mysticism, as if for him religion became bearable only when it overflowed into excess. Ruskin appealed to conscience, Pater to imagination. Ruskin invoked disciplined restraint, Pater allowed for a pleasant drift. What Ruskin reviled as vice, Pater caressed as wantonness. Wilde was as concerned for his soul as for his body, and however titillated he was by Pater, he looked to Ruskin for spiritual guidance (*Oscar Wilde* 48-9).

Wilde's embrace of aestheticism appears to coincide with his reading of Walter Pater's *Studies in History of the Renaissance* during his first term at Oxford in 1874. Richard Ellmann explicitly compares Lord Henry's verbal seduction of Dorian to the effect that Pater had on Wilde (*Oscar Wilde* 51). Ellmann further indicates that Ruskin's Ferry Hinskey Road construction effort, that Wilde took part in, strongly persuaded him that art could improve society (*Oscar Wilde* 50). Richard Dellamora, in *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism*, relates how Ruskin became concerned with the association of genius with madness and degeneration after discovering the erotic drawings of J.M.W. Turner, an artist that Ruskin had previously celebrated as the greatest of modern painters. Ruskin took these erotic drawings as signs of mental derangement (Dellamora 119). In a letter to his father defending Swinburne's poetry, Ruskin wrote "There are sick men- and whole men; and there are Bad men, and Good. We must not confuse any of these characters with each other" (Dellamora 122). Dellamora argues that here Ruskin is acknowledging "that genius, including implicitly his own, is also a diseased thing," and that with the advent of psychiatric Darwinism, sexual nonconformity, artistic genius, and madness were often linked together. The chapters in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where Basil Hallward confronts Dorian first about his "sins," demands to see his portrait of Dorian, and then is subsequently murdered by the subject of his art suggest that Wilde shared this implicit preoccupation of Ruskin's. The influences that Lord Henry and Basil

Hallward exert on Dorian, one encouraging self-cultivation and the other self-denial, find a parallel in how Ellmann frames the influences of Pater and Ruskin on the young Wilde at Oxford:

> An atmosphere of suppressed invitation runs through Pater's book, just as an atmosphere of suppressed refusal runs through Ruskin's work… Something of the extraordinary effect of the *Studies* upon Wilde came from their being exercises in the seduction of young men by the wiles of culture… For Wilde the two stood like heralds beckoning him in opposite directions. If he needed evidence for what he would say later, that 'Criticism is the highest form of autobiography,' he could find it in their unconscious self-revelation. The rhythms with which one denounced were matched by the rhythms with which the other beguiled. One was post-Christian, the other postpagan. Ruskin was sublime, full of solemn reproof, and fanatical; Pater insidious, all vibration, but cautious (*Oscar Wilde* 51).

My purpose in drawing a parallel between the influence of Ruskin and Pater on Wilde and Basil Hallward and Lord Henry on Dorian is not to support a crude biographical reading of the text, but to introduce the dialectic between ethics and aesthetics that Ellmann understands as animating Wilde's work. Christopher Craft sees a similar dialectic between Basil and Lord Henry. In "Come See about Me," Craft sees the portrait of Dorian "as a literal presence marking an objectal absence" that Wilde then puts "to work as a ferocious Platonic sublimate. For not only is the portrait the material precipitate of Basil's troubled desire for Dorian, and hence the bearer of 'the secret of [Basil's] own soul' (*DG,* 176); it is also the stunning product of his difficult renunciation" (Craft 120). Lord Henry's influence contributes to the constitution of

Dorian's image as a unified subject as well, that is nonetheless turned against itself through the competing doctrines of the two men:

> While narrating Dorian's final sitting before Basil, Wilde carefully traces a complicated *audio*visual interchange among (not between) men and then maps its effects upon the painting as it is completed. During this interchange Dorian literally incorporates the desires of both Basil and Lord Henry for the unspoiled youth whom Dorian is about to dismiss with an impious prayer. Yet these desires are deeply problematic, not simply because Wilde marks them as same-sex desires, but rather because they have already been marked, or rather marred, by particular historical and textual inflections: Basil's by an idealizing Platonism that disdains the call of the flesh and calls instead for its sublimation into art, thought, and prayer; Lord Henry's by a counterposed 'new hedonism' (*DG*, 189) that repudiates this Platonic disdain and promises instead a renascent being-in-the-flesh, one that refuses all limitation as it seeks 'to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream' (*DG,* 185). Together these two extremes, each the other's palpable obverse, define the homosexual possibility in *Dorian Gray* as an inescapable double bind: excessive restraint on the one hand, unrestrained license on the other. Once Dorian's person is inserted into this double bind, the vertices of the fatal triangle are in place (122).

The dominant literary ideology, as expounded by Matthew Arnold, was to privilege the ethical character of the written word in English. Wilde frequently inverts the privileging of ethics over aesthetics and confounds the difference between the two in quotes such as Lord Henry's "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearance" (62). Despite Lord Henry's flippant remark that marks him as a proponent of aestheticism, he is the one that attributes a superior

moral sense inherent in his upper class upbringing to Dorian and declares his capacity for murder

impossible (241). Meanwhile, Basil Hallward, associated with restraint and denial, is confounded

that the immoralities that Dorian has committed have not marred his physical appearance (181).

This reversal between Lord Henry and Basil Hallward mimics the transposition between the

actuality of Dorian and his image, and the result is not an inversion of Victorian bourgeois

values, but rather a sense of ambiguity. Wilde's ambivalent attitude extends to his response to

criticism of the novel. As Norman Page notes in an appendix to the Broadview edition of the

novel, Wilde responds to an attack by a reviewer in the *St. James Gazette* in a letter to the paper

anticipating the position in the preface he would add to the novel a year later: "The sphere of art

and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct," but inexplicably, in a second letter to the paper,

Wilde argues that the novel is "A story with a moral… And the moral is this: All excess, as well

as all renunciation, brings its own punishment," and he further complicates the role of Basil

Hallward and Lord Henry by describing the painter in aesthetic terms, one who is guilty of

"worshipping physical beauty too much" and Lord Henry as exercising a critical role equal to

that described by Matthew Arnold, as an objective judge who "seeks to be merely the spectator

of life" (271-272).

The first chapter of the novel presents a number of other binary oppositions, such as

nature and culture, mind and body, truth and image, and master and subject. While Christopher

Craft and other critics have focused on the violence and degeneration of Dorian as a divided self,

captivated by his own image, there is a positive potential inherent in such a subject. Just as the

painting absorbs the craft of Basil Hallward and the expression inspired by the words of Lord

Henry, Dorian is a synthesis of the oppositions represented by those characters influencing his

development. Furthermore, he acts as a supplement, revising those categories that form a stable

binary at the beginning of the novel. Dorian reorganizes the means that Basil Hallward

sublimates his desires into his art, so that Dorian's life becomes his art while at the same time

extending Lord Henry's aesthetic theories into moral practices, recalling Wilde's call in his

lectures on "The House Beautiful" to employ art to "raise and sanctify everything it touched"

(Ellmann 194). Dorian fulfills the desires of both Basil Hallward and Lord Henry, becoming both

an incorruptible body and a mind able to experience the breadth and variety the world has to

offer while still maintaining a studied detachment, but his cultivation of both influences appears

to make his subsequent degeneration necessary. Dominic Manganiello in "Ethics and Aesthetics

in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" has explored the novel as an attack on the duality between these

terms and concluded that this novel celebrating aestheticism is also a cautionary tale in the vein

of the Faustus legend that warns the reader of the excesses of that same movement. Richard

Ellmann comes to much the same conclusion in his biography of Wilde, calling the book "the

aesthetic novel *par excellence,* not in espousing the doctrine, but in exhibiting its dangers" (315),

and Craft, of course, echoes this. To place the novel in a larger context, however, the body of

Dorian, untouched by worldly or spiritual corruption but corroding everything it touches and

then collapsing into a corpse "withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage" while restoring the

portrait to youth and beauty (251), becomes a floating signifier generated in response to a crisis

in Victorian language and culture during the fin de siècle, a symbolic repository for unresolved

logical contradictions and unnamable, socially unacceptable desires. Wilde's conception of the

self in *Dorian Gray* hints at a deeper crisis of meaning and signifying.

Linda Dowling, in *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle,* explains

British Decadence as a movement dedicated to salvaging something from the Anglophone

literary tradition after the introduction of comparative philology from the Continent destabilized

the Romantic doctrine of the logos, a model that linked spoken or written signifier with a social signified just as an earlier theological model of the logos had posited a metaphysically transcendent signified. The presence of the logos as a basis in discourses had the effect of both expressing and authorizing the greatness of British culture, expressing as the nation developed into an imperial center. As comparative philology proposed a system that understood language as a system of signs that operated autonomously from culture and threatened to displace the Romantic philological model, this linguistic instability precipitated cultural crisis and anxiety over the continued growth and stability of the British Empire.

Dowling argues that Walter Pater attempts to salvage the literary tradition by privileging written language, artifice, over speech by treating "the literary tongue of the great English writers…[as] simply another dead language in relation to living speech," and Dowling later writes that Pater's own tale of self-development, *Marius the Epicurean*, attempts "to employ English as a classical dialect, to bestow a belated and paradoxical vitality on a literary language that linguistic science had declared to be dead" (*xv*). This clearly seems to mark Decadence as a precursor to literary Modernism, and in this instance, Pater's "salvaging" of classical language seems to anticipate Ezra Pound's dictum of "make it new," but Dowling also identifies Decadence as a forerunner of post-structuralism: "what has emerged in our time as Foucault's theory of discourse or Derridean deconstruction is none other than that dark spectre of autonomous language that haunted literary Decadence" (*xiii*). While Dowling frames Pater as the originator of this critique, she depicts Wilde, on the other hand, as sensationalizing and popularizing Pater's literary Decadence. Dowling describes *Dorian Gray* as derivative of Pater's style and work, saying that Wilde has a "characteristic habit of appropriating, exaggerating, and hence 'coarsening' Pater's thought" (156). She describes the character Dorian as "the antinomian

descendant of Pater's characters," and remarks that the fatal book that corrupts Dorian is unmistakably modeled on "elements in Huysmans's *A Rebours*, Pater's 'Conclusion,' *Marius,* and *Gaston de Latour*, as well as several more fugitive works (from which Wilde permitted himself to borrow with more generosity)" (170).

I differ with Dowling on this point. Between Pater and Wilde, Wilde appears to be the more original and innovative of the two. My reading of Pater is that he accepts the deconstructive critique inherent in his aestheticism, but his writing, particularly in *Marius*, is marked by a nostalgia for the written word as theological *logos*, and if he cannot tether sign to signified through metaphysics, he yearns to do so through aestheticism, by enshrining English as a rival to the ancient and sacred classical languages. Pater was, in effect, repackaging the Romantic ideal of a national clerisy for the modern age. Marius, as a model of the self, may fuse the Christian and the pagan, the sacred and the profane, but at least he is a recognizable figure. The narrative of his development is neat, and orderly, and designed not to offend anyone in particular. Wilde, in contrast, seems to anticipate a shipwreck of colliding languages, cultures, and meanings in English literature as the language reaches international audiences, and English culture borrows as much culture from abroad as it gives to the rest of the world, and he relishes the resulting strife and confusion. When designing a protagonist for his *Bildungsroman,* even Wilde cannot seem to decide whether Dorian is a monster or a Promethean figure like Milton's Satan. In other words, when Wilde fuses the sacred and the profane, he makes a mess.

Gerald Monsman has written at length about Wilde's awareness of Pater's work and described Pater's insistence on the distinction between his Platonic aestheticism and the more bodily and decadent aestheticism that Wilde initiated with *Dorian Gray*. Unlike Pater, who is interested in reviving the grand tradition of English literature through his aestheticism, Wilde

seems more radical, more avant-garde, more sordid and upsetting to the status quo. Yet the text of *Dorian Gray*, as with much of Wilde's body of literature, frustrates attempts by recent critics to categorize his works. Is he an Irish writer who never seems to acknowledge his heritage? Is Wilde a queer writer before the term "homosexuality" was even coined? Is he advocating criminal hedonism when he insists that the artist should privilege aesthetics over ethics and yet still maintains that his book of hedonistic excess and unspeakable sins is moral?

I maintain that Wilde is attempting to articulate an intersectional subject in *Dorian Gray* that he knew was unacceptable to his reading public, but that he sensed was inevitable and that Wilde felt expressed his self's own contradictions and evasions. Dorian, as a subject, undermines the coherence of the British subject by being the product of gentility, possibly from Scotland, and the military, crossing national and class lines. Dorian's heterosexual desires in the case of Sibyl Vane are based on the appearance of their romance rather than authentic feelings, and as noted above, Dorian expresses more passion for Lord Henry and his unmentionable "crimes" than he does for his fiancée. I suspect Wilde's choices when it comes to Dorian are political, but these political moves are obscured by aesthetic misdirections. Wilde is too provocative a figure to resist speculating about him briefly.

There is a body of literature devoted to finding Irish antecedents in Wilde's creations, as well as defending Wilde against charges of plagiarism by explaining his extensive borrowings as part of the Irish oral tradition.[26] The only example of Wilde's Irish identity informing his

---

[26] Richard Haslam, in "The Hermeneutic Hazards of Hibernicizing Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," points to a critical trend in the late 1980s and mid- to late 1990s of stressing the Irish character of Wilde's writing, mentioning how Davis Coakley and Owen Dudley Edwards "skillfully evoked the social and intellectual environment in that Wilde grew up and highlighted almost every reference he made to Ireland," yet Haslam points to Ian Small's assertion that further work on Wilde as an Irish writer, specifically several essays in Jerusha McCormack's

political stance that comes to mind is his scathing review of J.A. Froude's novel *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy* in 1889 (in the same year, he was joined by Trinidadian author J.J. Thomas, who published *Froudacity*, attacking Froude's characterization of the Caribbean).

I am less interested in finding evidence of Wilde's Irish heritage in *Dorian Gray* than I am in examining how Wilde situates his *Bildungsheld* as what Nancy Armstrong describes as a Misfit, the "bad subject" that in resisting subjection promises to validate (but in Dorian's case denies validation) to harmonious socialization through a narrative of self-development, as distinct from Walter Pater's Marius or Gaston de Latour, characters that in many ways are Pater's attempts to disassociate his aestheticism from the kind promulgated by Wilde and integrate aestheticism into contemporary Victorian culture. While Marius's Epicureanism undergoes refinement through his encounters with Stoicism and Christianity, resolving into a doctrine that celebrates Platonic or intellectual hedonism but adopts many of the ethical practices of the communities Marius encounters along his journey, Dorian Gray cultivates his inner life in isolation from society, concealing it behind a mask of youthfulness and innocence. In doing so, Wilde subverts many of the conventional tropes of the *Bildungsheld*, including what is essentially Pater's plot of harmonious social integration in *Marius*. Even if Wilde's Dorian isn't an Irishman, he seems to have no real love for London's polite society. Dorian circulates among the privileged, but he enjoys their company only in proportion to his capacity to mock them,

---

collection *Wilde the Irishman,* were "highly speculative and seem to strain to make connections" (Haslam 37). The reality is that despite Wilde's rich Anglo-Irish upbringing, in that his mother gained fame as an Irish nationalist poet and his father collected several volumes of Irish folktales, Wilde's heritage remains a ghostly presence in his work that he rarely explicitly evokes. That being said, I argue that he often frames his characters as resorting to artifice and posture as a result of their status as being orphaned, displaced, or isolated, and it requires little work to imagine Wilde, as an Anglo-Irish outsider endeavoring to fit into London high society, as sympathetic to such figures, and perhaps expressing himself as these marginalized figures are wont to do: through code, evasions, and subtle ironic statements.

corrupt them, and push them toward self-destruction. While he cannot be identified as part of an established category existing outside British society, he certainly does not exist *inside* that society.

Dorian's self-development involves him becoming an immortal seducer pretending to be an innocent youth, a being that stays young forever by drowning in sensuality and leaving a swath of destruction in his wake, a thing akin to a vampire. The symbolism of the vampire taps into a vein of Romantic individualism that evokes Lord Byron, a seductive threat to the traditional English community that is associated with foreign power and ideas. To return to *How Novels Think* for a moment, Nancy Armstrong makes the case that Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* as a Victorian fin-de-siècle Gothic, creates an alternative to the nuclear family in the form of Dracula's virus-like aggregate of vampires that violate the integrity of the individual victim and circulate knowledge freely with their collective in the same fashion that they steal blood from the living. Dracula forces Mina to drink his blood and is able to see through her eyes while she is also able to tell Van Helsing and the other hunters where Dracula flees after his plans in England are thwarted. The protagonists in the novel respond by utilizing her link to Dracula, but also by sharing and generating knowledge amongst themselves.[27] The development of character in Stoker's Gothic is, according to Armstrong, a "defensive individualism." Armstrong reverses recent critical opinion, arguing that a scene in Dracula that involves the vampire violating Mina and Jonathan Harker sexually "is not using sex to render intolerable the foreigner, the Jew, the

---

[27] Armstrong also sees this as gendered; Mina's transcription and de-personalized reproduction of their experiences is strangely vampire-like in the sense of it being produced and reproduced on a typewriter, and this kindred quality perhaps opens her to vampiric infection. As a result of her infection, the men take over her role as disseminator of knowledge and shut her out of their councils until she can be purified, at that point she becomes a mother, responsible for producing a child who shares the names of every man in their band (Armstrong 130).

Oriental, or the immigrant, the features of that Dracula bears. This novel uses the foreigner, the

Jew, the Oriental, and the immigrant to render intolerable all social groupings hostile to the

family" (146). The family manages to survive by incorporating the capacity of the vampire to

reproduce, circulate, and utilize new forms of knowledge, and the band of vampire hunters

becomes "an international community of experts" that takes advantage of their accumulated

literary knowledge, much of it gathered from the past or abroad. As presented in Dracula, the

solution to English domesticity being corrupted by the outside world was the British Empire's

mastery of that world by inoculating itself against these foreign bodies.

The specter of the Gothic was invoked in the fin de siècle (and Armstrong includes

Dorian Gray) in order "to imagine what was unnatural and aberrant in order to maintain the

normative subject and make readers want to embody it" (134). The struggle, in Gothic novels

like *Dracula*, to exert this expertise signaled the creation of a modern individual with the cultural

authority to grapple with these threatening external influences. Yet in *Dorian Gray*, the

Bildungsheld is initially constructed as being as marginal as *Dracula*. Just as Stevenson's *The

Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* does, rather than grappling with an external Other,

Dorian Gray posits a modern individual who becomes estranged from himself. The role of the

Gothic in the Victorian fin de siècle novel is to reinforce a normative individual within the

context of the nuclear family. The traditional English *Bildungsroman* typically resolved in the

formation of this family. Everything outside the heteronormative, white British relationships

between the members of the family and society threatened the stability of the individual as a

socially-embedded and socially-validated subject. Dorian may not be recognizable as a member

of a particular marginal group, but he assuredly belongs to a broad category that includes all

those things that are threatening to the nuclear British family: those deemed sexual "inverts,"

foreigners, and criminals. The lengths that the text goes to occlude Dorian's specific "crimes" and "sins" signals that these acts may be *any kind* of proscribed behaviors, and therefore that he may be *any kind* of proscribed type.

In "Writing Gone Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation," Ed Cohen argues that "Wilde consciously constructed and marketed himself as a liminal figure within British class relations, straddling the lines between nobility, aristocracy, middle class, and- in his sexual encounters- working class" (Cohen 160-1). While Wilde's public image was elusive and ambiguous, in the aftermath of his trial, Cohen writes that there is little doubt in the mind of critics that *Dorian Gray* is an obviously homoerotic text despite Wilde's straight language. Cohen suggests that the aesthetic preoccupations of the three main characters within "a sphere of art and leisure in that male friendships assume primary emotional importance and in that traditional male values (industry, earnestness, morality) are abjured in favor of the aesthetic" subverts "traditional bourgeois representations of appropriate male behavior" and "by projecting the revelation, growth, and demise of Dorian's 'personality' onto an aesthetic consideration of artistic creation, Wilde demonstrates how the psychosexual development of an individual gives rise to the 'double consciousness' of a marginalized group" (Cohen 167). His overall argument is that the erotic is symbolically displaced onto the aesthetic within the novel, and the passions of the characters for each other are mediated through representations. Basil creates visual art "that synthetically mirrors his emotional and erotic reality" while Lord Henry "segments this aesthetic space into the paradoxes and conundrums that characterize his linguistic style" (Cohen 170). Dorian's image is the synthesis of their sublimated desires, but I would argue that the image also presents the possibility of public acknowledgement of those desires. Cohen sees the moment when Dorian kisses Sibyl, and she is "incapable of making a male-defined representation of

female passion 'real'" (Cohen 173), as the moment when his heterosexual fantasies centered on her collapse as she fails to meet his aesthetic standards, and her subsequent suicide leads to a disjunction between Dorian as a specular self and a socially-embedded being fated to wed, take up a vocation, and raise children. His image, his 'real' image as a social being, is condemned to an abandoned schoolroom, almost a literal closet. With the picture locked away from prying eyes, the gulf between Dorian's public images, the eternally youthful face he wears while pursuing his diversions, and this closeted self grows and grows.

Other critics share Cohen's opinion that while *Dorian Gray* might not be directly representative of queer experience, the novel employs denials and occlusions as a tactic for changing the terms that the public uses to refer to male-male desire. Lawrence Danson, in "Oscar Wilde, W.H. and the Unspoken Name of Love," sees Wilde as believing that his language might overcome the prevailing legal and scientific discourses that defined his desires as criminal. Other critics see Wilde's texts as undermining the categories delineating "normal" from "deviant" completely. Jonathon Dollimore, in "Different Desires: Subjectivity and Transgression," contrasts Wilde with André Gide, declaring that Wilde promotes a decentered subject, "the relinquishing of the essential self," while Gide's acknowledgement of his transgressive sexuality "leads to a discovery of the authentic self" (Dollimore 44). The ending of *Dorian Gray*, in that the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* seems to murder himself by destroying a picture that represents his soul (or equating the soul of Dorian with the image in the first place), would seem to support Dollimore's interpretation of Wilde's work as antihumanist.

Daniel A. Novak, in "Sexuality in the Age of Technological Reproduction: Oscar Wilde, Photography, and Identity" brilliantly builds upon the U.S. Supreme Court case that ruled that the photograph of Wilde by Napoleon Sarony was a work of art, using the interplay of the words

"person" and "personality" between Sir Edward Carson, counsel for the prosecution, and Wilde, and the contrast between the terms "portrait" and "picture" to arrive at a conclusion similar to Dollimore's. He discusses briefly a scientific discourse that involved creating photographic images of a criminal or racial type through composites of exemplars, and discusses how photographs of Wilde himself continue to serve as a template for a homosexual "type" (Novak 70-3). Novak cites the photographic critic A.H. Wall as distinguishing between a portrait and a picture "by associating a photograph and a portrait with a form of mechanical realism and a picture with language and narrative" (Novak 82). Wall further argued that true photographic art involved transforming photographs into pictures by telling a story. The way this was accomplished was by posing the subject: "For Sarony, the only way to produce a proper photographic likeness, the only way to produce an authentic photographic subject, was, paradoxically, for the sitter to surrender any identity, subjectivity, or consciousness that might make itself visible" (Novak 79). In the case of Wilde's picture, "Wilde's body became the abstract raw material that allowed Sarony's 'original mental conception' to achieve a 'visible form.' Like Wilde's own artist's models [and Sibyl Vane, and Dorian himself], he became interesting to Sarony only when he was not himself…Wilde disappeared as an identifiable subject to reappear as the negative embodiment of Sarony's photographic intentions" (Novak 80). Novak suggests that Wilde "allegorizes this distinction between portrait and picture" in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (i.e. the portrait becomes a picture), and that "photographs reproduce secrecy rather than identifiable subjects. For Wilde, photographic 'portraits' are 'pictures'- a form of literature and a form of fiction" (Novak 83). Novak describes Basil Hallward as refashioning Dorian as a representation of his own desire, and additionally, Dorian provides an "abstract form of raw material that can be made to embody any identity… Like Sarony's

54

projecting his 'mental conception' onto Wilde's 'surrendered' body, or like Wilde's artists turning their models into art, Lord Henry's form of artistic re-creation depends on Dorian Gray remaining a perpetually open and abstract 'form.' As Lord Henry boasts later, 'To a large extent the lad was his own creation'…Moreover, Lord Henry's 'creation' remains abstract: 'a marvelous *type'"* (Novak 88). Novak describes the character of Dorian Gray, like Wilde himself, as serving as abstract material for a *type* that readers can fashion and refashion to reflect their own desires.

The implications of Novak's essay lead me to the concluding points of this chapter. This chapter has focused on how Wilde's novel rejects a reactionary approach toward the Gothic in his *Bildungsroman* and, in encoding queer desire in his protagonist, makes the narrative of self-development accessible to nonidentical subjects in literature written in the Anglophone colonies. *Dorian Gray* is couched firmly in the *Bildungsroman* tradition, telling the story of a young orphan who, prompted by a mentor, embarks on a journey of self-discovery and formation. In contrast to the English *Bildung* of the immediately preceding decades, that operated on a *Bildung* of harmonious socialization and resolved in marriage, the discovery of a productive vocation, or both, *Dorian Gray* recalls an earlier form of spiritual-aesthetic *Bildung* associated with German texts such as *Wilhelm Meister*, but Wilde's fin-de-siècle text does not culminate in its *Bildungsheld* identifying with the spirit of its nation or age. Instead, the Gothic degeneration of the protagonist suggests social nonidentification and an implicit appropriation of the novel's form as part of a modernist critique of the traditional *Bildungsroman* genre. The undecideability of the novel's central dialectical conflicts, between aesthetics and ethics, nature and culture, mind and body, truth and image, master and subject, leaves a space open for the construction of a "negative self" that conflates marginalized or as-yet unrealized identities associated with the

periphery of the British Empire, "deviant" sexuality, and the criminal. This "abstract form of raw material," as Novak puts it, enters the tradition of the English novel for the *Bildungroman's* author to reconstruct as subject positions that had no place and no name in the British novel.

As the unmarked signifier of the white heteronormative male loses its central place in the *Bildungsroman,* authors in emerging regional literatures across the Atlantic and beyond seize on the form to express their own alienation from Western ideological apparatuses.

CHAPTER TWO

COLONIZED *BILDUNGSROMANE* OF NIGERIA AND KENYA

Customarily, Western scholars identify the beginnings of a body of written African

literature with Christian missions established in the last few centuries as missionaries invented

written forms of indigenous languages and translated the Bible to these native dialects. If one

searches for earlier forms of African literacy however, the Qur'an precedes the introduction of

the Bible on the continent with an Arabic presence in sub-Saharan Africa early in the last

millennium, and Latin works were written by North African authors prior to that (Irele 2). The

publication of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko or the Royal Slave* in 1688 appears to be the forerunner

of a variety of colonial writings about Africa in English,[28] and the appearance of the first African

Bildungsroman in English is debatable.[29] While Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*

stands as an early example of a *Bildungsroman* in English by an African white settler, the form

---

[28] Chinua Achebe makes frequent reference to *The Africa That Never Was* by Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow as his primary source for British colonial writing about Africa from 1530 to his own time.

[29] It might be argued that *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, published in 1789, in addition to being the earliest known example of a slave narrative, also contains elements of *Bildung* (Amoko 197), in that part of Equiano's liberation involves his acculturation and identification with Western culture. While Equiano identified as a slave taken from West Africa as a child, there is some controversy about this claim. Vincent Carretta, for one, points to two archival sources that would indicate that Equiano was born in South Carolina, not Western Africa (Amoko 204-5). After Equiano, a number of novels written by white colonial authors exhibit elements of *Bildung*, including Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*. The African setting of these colonial novels is usually little more than a murky background or a blank slate for the formation of an isolated European subject.

was not adopted widely by African writers in English until after the independence of their

respective Commonwealth nations, and its emergence and circulation is best understood in the

context of late modernity and the post-colonial. The genre functions in part as a reaction to the

presence of the modern European individual in an African context, whether the subject in

question is an expatriate European or a colonized native. It is an attempt to integrate this

individual into various African regional cultures, but also a part of a wider effort to grapple with

the pressure to be both a modern individual and an authentic part of a traditional African

community. We will first consider in theory how the strategies involved in this struggle with

modernity work in the African novel before exploring how it plays out specifically in the

Bildungsroman of African writers.

One of the earliest African authors writing in English to reclaim Africa as a space for

African literature and represent the moment of contact between indigenous Africans with

European colonizers from an indigenous perspective is Chinua Achebe. His 1958 novel, *Things

Fall Apart*, depicts Igbo villagers pursuing different strategies to account for the European

newcomers and their involvement in their affairs. In other works, Achebe expands on how Igbo

art can provide a tool for contextualizing the unprecedented disruption of first contact with an

alien culture. In *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, for example, Achebe indicates that

an imperative of the Owerri's Igbo art involves the integration of the outsider:

> To the Igbo mentality, art must, among other uses, provide a means to domesticate that
>
> that is wild; it must act like the lightning conductor that arrests destructive electrical
>
> potentials and channels them harmlessly to earth. The Igbo insists that any presence that
>
> is ignored, denigrated, denied acknowledgement and celebration, can become a focus for

anxiety and disruption. To them, celebration is the acknowledgement, not the welcoming,

of a presence. It is the courtesy of giving to everybody his due (110-111).

Achebe identifies this function by an Owerri Igbo word, *mbari*, after a tradition of creating a

temple of artistic representations of those things that constituted Owerri life, including European

figures (*Country* 18). I find it striking how close the sacred community of the *mbari*, practicing a

rite involving the acknowledgement of alterity, is to Kant's vision of an inclusive global republic

in his essay "Perpetual Peace." Kant's vision is in turn based on the kindred idea of hospitality,

an idea that involves "the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy… It is not a question

of being received as a guest…it is rather a right of visit, a right of demanding of others that they

admit one to their society" (qtd. In Armstrong 150).

A significant difference emerges between the depiction of the inclusive society of

autonomous individuals first envisioned by Kant and culminating in the modern individual's

resistance to harmonious socialization and the *mbari* celebration's acknowledgement of

diversity. This acknowledgement of diversity as part of the *mbari* is a unique Nigerian

contribution to the African *Bildungsroman.* The modern *Bildungsroman* constructs an individual

that actively resists social identification while the artistic panorama of the Igbo *mbari* imagines a

plurality of nonidentical, even hostile elements that coexist with those that comprise the core

community. The nonidentical British *Bildungsheld* at the fin de siècle often becomes a Gothic or

self-loathing figure, such as Wilde's Dorian or Hardy's Jude, and a *Bildungsroman* that leads its

protagonist to a maturity reconciled with society becomes less and less likely in literary

modernism, especially as modernist writers became increasingly critical of British imperialism.

More often, the potential *Bildungsheld* is an artist who strives to express an unconventional

identity that cannot be reconciled with social norms, such as in the *Künstlerroman* of Joyce's

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. In the last decades of the nineteenth century and first half

of the twentieth, subjects whose desires are nonidentical to the West's vision of the model

subject and that cannot be sublimated by art find expression on the fringes of European

Imperialism, and sometimes these return as the exotic in novels of adventure, the nonidentical

elements safely identified with the sphere of the Orient.[30]

Just as modern individualism arises out of subjects that position themselves as the

"negative self" of the harmoniously socialized Victorian individual, the image of Africa becomes

the "negative reflection, the shadow, of the British self-image" (Hammond 197). As Hammond

and Jablow note in *The Africa That Never Was*, the goal of education for British gentlemen was

"not the full development of the individual, but the conquest of the self" (186). They proceed to

argue that "spontaneous behavior [that] is aggressive and destructive" was identified with

immature human nature. The design of British public education was to civilize the nation's

governing class, who were in turn charged with disciplining, as one would children, the lower

classes and the natives of colonized lands. While many European writers have described the

civilizing mission of British imperialism, there were certainly others who found the margins of

Empire, among them Africa, to be a place where they could pursue a spiritual-aesthetic

development of the self as opposed to conditioning their desires to serve the nation.

---

[30] In *Sexual Anarchy*, Elaine Showalter mentions that Sir Richard Burton in the "Terminal
Essay" of his translation of the *Arabian Nights* describes the Orient as a transgressive space he
called the "Sotadic Zone" where European subjects were free to engage in androgyny, pederasty,
and perversion (Showalter 81). Richard Dellamora, in *Masculine Desire*, discusses R.M.
Milnes's "sexual adventures" in the Orient as well (Dellamora 20), and, of course, Oscar Wilde,
while in exile after his trial, introduced André Gide to a male prostitute in Algiers. Graham
Dawson devotes an entire book to how the image of the soldier hero abroad helps shape and
authorizes a masculinity that includes the pleasures of war at the heart of the empire; in these
books, sexual and violent license find expression in the literary equivalent of imperialism.

To Nancy Armstrong, it is Kant's notion of a society constituted of autonomous subjects negotiating the limits of their individualism through alternating resistance and tacit acceptance that institutes and propels the English novel, and a similar negotiation between indigenous, integrative, and artistic imperatives such as the *mbari* and figures of English modernity that resist socialization that are introduced through late colonialism play out in the novels of African writers from Nigeria and Kenya. While the modern English novel of formation depicts an individual who resists socialization, in addition to inheriting this motif, the African *Bildungsroman* that appears after political independence imagines the resistance to, preservation of, and sometimes the recuperation of indigenous forms of cultural development alongside the drive to modernization. The relationship of African subjects to their communities in these novels is especially fraught because the tool that modernity provides subjects to critique society, the position of the subject as a fundamentally *bad* subject who must resist interpellation or suffer existential death, also creates what Frantz Fanon describes as the either/or "Manichaeism" of colonialism (Fanon 6-7), in that the subject can only conceive of itself as a violent rebel or colonized assimilationist.

This is the reality for the colonized subject in Fanon's view of his time even though he also indicates in his writing that the colonized subject will eventually transcend this dichotomy. A sense of accommodation, of rising above violent ideological conflict, characterizes this cultural liberation from colonialism that recent African coming-of-age novels express. The postmodern African *Bildungsheld* that emerges, as in the writing of Nigeria's Third Generation authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, strives against remnants of cultural colonialism. Although in these later *Bildungsromane* the unrepentant colonized subject, still enforcing the ideology of the once-dominant metropole even after political liberation, as abusive as he or she

61

might be at times, ultimately becomes a tragic figure more pitied than demonized. This dissertation will look at African *Bildungsromane* that contend with the trauma of African nationalism that fails to empower every citizen such as Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* in the third chapter; ambivalence toward European modernity, however, precedes the disappointments of post-colonial independence by decades.

One may observe the first attempts at reconciling European individualism with African forms of social identification in African literature in the way English colonial authors were received and responded to by native audiences who started "writing back."[31] The roots of this phenomenon predate political independence. In the nascent West African literature of colonial Nigeria, how was a figure representative of modern individualism met by an indigenous audience? Stephanie Newell, in her article "Remembering J.M. Stuart-Young of Onitsha, Colonial Nigeria: Memoirs, Obituaries, and Names," describes how one British citizen, a suspect figure in Europe, was integrated into the Nigerian community of Onitsha in the early twentieth century through the practice of naming. Stuart-Young, nearly forgotten today but famous in the Nigeria of his time, appears in one of Chinua Achebe's short stories, "Uncle Ben's Choice," as the lover of a spirit, Mami Wota, a "crazy white man" who forsakes children and family for wealth (*Girls* 80). Achebe also references Stuart-Young as a legendary character he caught a glimpse of in his youth while visiting Onitsha for the first time (*Education* 15).

Newell writes that Stuart-Young was a lower-class clerk from Manchester who became a palm-oil trader and then the owner of a chain of stores in Onitsha, a man with literary ambitions

---

[31] The term was coined by Salman Rushdie in his 1982 article "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance" as a pun on the title of the second *Star Wars* film and was popularized by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*.

who, after being rejected by London critics, reinvented himself as a poet and memoirist for

African audiences, and improbably claimed to be the intimate of a cavalcade of English

luminaries (Newell 508), including the late Oscar Wilde.[32] Newell sees Stuart-Young's

autobiographical writings as encoding male-male desire, and the asymmetrical power

relationships between a colonizer such as Stuart-Young and those West African youths he

patronized as affording Stuart-Young the opportunity to express a sexual identity that had

become dangerous in Britain after the Oscar Wilde trials a decade earlier.[33] Considerations of

Stuart-Young's sexual identity aside, what is important here is that the identity the young man

from Manchester created through his publications in colonial Nigerian was acknowledged by the

populace and his contributions celebrated. Further, Newell argues that the practice of naming, the

---

[32] Newell writes that Stuart-Young claimed to know, among others, George Bernard Shaw, Rudyard Kipling, Havelock Ellis, Mary Kingsley, and of course, Oscar Wilde. There is a record of Lord Alfred Douglas, at least, writing back to Stuart-Young to say, "Please understand that I object most strongly to the impertinence that you have shown in writing to me a second time…I do not know you and have no desire to know you" (Newell 509). Stuart-Young had previously published a book called *Osrac the Self-Sufficient and Other Poems with a Memoir of the Late Oscar Wilde*, a record of a "long and passionate correspondence" with Wilde, including facsimiles of two handwritten letters from Wilde. There is little doubt today that the letters are forgeries, and Stuart-Young's claims of intimacy with Wilde were not given much credence in Great Britain at the time (Newell 506).

[33] Stuart-Young's most demonstrative relationships were with young African males. Newell describes these relationships as "Uranian," as they focused on the physical and aesthetic appreciation of the young male body as opposed to direct genital contact, that is implied in connection with contemporary use of the term "pederasty." One of Stuart-Young's servants, a young man named Onwuije Hayford Bosah, went with Stuart-Young to Manchester and went by the name 'Bosa' or 'Bosu,' and Newell points out the striking similarity of this nickname to Oscar Wilde's appellation for Lord Alfred Douglas. The implication is that Stuart-Young found expression for traits that remained nonidentical in a Victorian England virulently hostile to male-male desire by modeling the life and behaviors of Wilde (Newell 513). The West African community of Onitsha, in Newell's reckoning, was aware of Stuart-Young's sexual desires and efforts at rewriting his own identity in a space foreign to him, but due at least in part to an asymmetrical economic, political, and cultural relationship between Stuart-Young and the Onitsha community, their response was measured.

sobriquets and personal anecdotes applied to Stuart-Young, constitute a local response to his

efforts at self-representation (Newell 515-6).[34] One might assume that Stuart-Young's claims

were taken at face value by an African populace that lacked sufficient information to interrogate

his claims, but Newell's analysis of Stuart-Young's reception in Onitsha suggests a cannier

response to a dissenting European voice that at the same time utilized a position of privilege to

refashion personal history and social identity.

Stuart-Young's arrival in Onitsha, as well as his profession as a trader in palm-oil,

anticipated an economic boom following the discovery of the industrial uses of palm-kernels. He

followed river routes established by the slave trade to swap palm products for British luxury

goods. Stuart-Young was one of the few independent traders to survive declining prices and

corporate consolidation following the First World War, and after managing to lease land from

local chiefs in Onitsha, he opened his own stores that made him the richest independent palm

produce trader in Nigeria by 1919 (Newell 506-7). During this time, Stuart-Young produced a

series of idealized accounts of his life and connections for African newspapers. Newspapers such

as the *West African Pilot* published his sayings and poems alongside reproductions of lines by

canonical British authors while others, such as the *Nigerian Eastern Mail* and the *African*

Advertiser gave him space to publish his opinions. Newell speculates that these newspapers

---

[34] Even Nigerian critics, such as Rotimi Omoyele Fasan, have seen the advent of colonialism
primarily as a disruption of the "normal evolution" of African literature from an oral tradition to
a written tradition, and this leads to the idea of African literature based on indigenous languages
as authentic while those written in the language of the colonizers as a minor tributary of the
wellspring of Western literature centered on European and the United States. In this chapter, I
look at African literature as a regional phenomenon rather than a national, linguistic, or ethnic
tradition although I focus specifically on indigenous African authors writing in English and use
the convention of the *Bildung* genre to find continuity and comparison with literatures from other
regions.

provided Stuart-Young a forum "in a political demonstration to the colonial regime that not all Englishmen were 'above' educated Africans or writing against their ideologies" (Newell 508).

When Stuart-Young died from throat cancer in 1939, Newell describes his obituaries, especially those written by Nnamdi Azikiwe, an anti-colonial nationalist and editor, as locating him in "an Afrocentric and proto-nationalist literary tradition," and holding up his life as a heroic biography that offers an "exemplar of a hoped-for postcoloniality" and a monument to "the cause of inter-racial cooperation" (516). Newell employs these obituaries, as well as conferences with eyewitnesses in Onitsha, to reconstruct the public image of Stuart-Young. First, Stuart-Young's most public and most flattering name was 'Odeziaku,' meaning "keeper, caretaker, or arranger of wealth." Newell relates that the market women of Onitsha first gave Stuart-Young this name as a tribute to his accumulation of wealth and financial patronage of the community, and indicates that "the hint at hoarding and individualism conveyed by this name is moderated by the suggestion that he was keeping his wealth on behalf of the community, 'arranging' his money with the welfare of others in mind" (518). The ambiguity of the term hints at a broader Nigerian anxiety toward the introduction of market capitalism to local communities that is reflected in later literature, and the accumulation of wealth becomes understood as both liberating and disruptive.[35] 'Odeziaku' becomes, for Stuart-Young, both a brand name for his company and a symbol of his putative acceptance by the community of Onitsha as one of their own.

---

[35] In Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, for example, Nnu Ego's trading is the only thing that sustains her family in Lagos when her second husband, Nnaife, fails to provide financial support, and Nnaife often uses the acquisition of money abroad as a rationale for abandoning the family. Likewise, Nnu Ego's fellow wife Adaku manages through the wealth she acquires by trade to leave Nnaife's household and live on her own although the Igbo community of Lagos sees her behavior as scandalous.

To the children who visited his store, Stuart-Young was often referred to as 'Eke Young,' associating him with the sacred Eke pythons that were taboo to kill. This appellation refers to a constellation of associations, from the 'untouchable' status of the python, to its supernatural qualities, to the dread that people held it in as something dangerous and irresistible (Newell 520). Newell also maintains that Stuart-Young's interest in the occult and his affinity for the funhouse mirrors displayed outside his stories gave him the reputation in Onitsha of being the votary of the water spirit, Mami Wata. Mami Wata is a spirit associated with the water routes that the inland slave trade and then modernization, both economic and cultural force, invaded the Nigerian countryside. Newell argues that Mami Wata "would have represented a historically located and specific fusion of meanings relating to modernity, money, trade, consumption and production in the early twentieth century" and that oral accounts by elder citizens of Onitsha in 2002 put this figure at the center of "socioeconomic debates and spiritual beliefs" (522). In other words, Stuart-Young's "marriage" to Mami Wata expresses a deep personal investment by an individual in European modernity itself, and the rewards of modernity- wealth, social mobility, liberty, self-identification, a break from oppressive conventions- are acquired at the expense of traditional communal values, such as devotion to an extended agrarian-based family unit and the comforting aspects of gender roles associated with this kinship model.

Those names conferred upon Stuart-Young, several of them associated with indigenous folklore, in turn present an early effort at integrating into an inclusive cultural framework through folk appellations a modern individual exemplifying qualities desirable for interacting with a colonizing nation that were otherwise held to be at odds with indigenous communal values. While the model of the English novel described by Nancy Armstrong in *How Novels Think* involves asserting mastery over transgressive, disruptive figures like the gothic villain or

66

the Misfit, built in to the African *Bildungsroman* with this practice of naming is an attempt to acknowledge foreign elements and respect diversity.

Chinua Achebe demonstrates how this practice of naming, of rendering a foreign thing in the indigenous language to incorporate it and as a means of writing back, works in *Home in Exile,* when he describes how the children in his town of Ogidi called the Royal Mail carrier lorry "Ogbu-akwu-ugwo, that means Killer-that-doesn't-pay-back," a reaction that is a mixture of "admiration and fear" (77). This tension between resistance and integration animates the text of Chinua Achebe's masterpiece *Things Fall Apart* as well, and that novel serves as a model that informs later *Bildungsromane* of post-colonial development. The function of the early African novel, for Achebe, is in achieving what he describes as a "balance of stories," the "re-storying" of those dispossessed by understanding the principle that "*People create stories create people*; or rather, *stories create people create stories*" (*Hopes* 162); this process of creating stories to create people, for the last century, has in part involved an African reply to the European genre of the *Bildungsroman*.[36] The strength of the African *Bildungroman* is that one's own story does not supplant or contradict those of others, but attempts to acknowledge them.

---

[36] One of the basic assumptions of this study is that modernity and post-modernity constitute each a type of subjectivity. By entering into dialogue with other global literary traditions, finding fault with constitutive ideologies of subjectivity and resisting them, and attempting to develop an independent, pre-intervention, or originating literature of social identification, African writers create from an essentially modern subject position. Their struggle, while different in character, was roughly contemporary and similar in character to the efforts of Europeans in the preceding century. The Victorians, for example, explored what it meant to be English through the formulation of a literary canon that established their origins prior to the various Continental interventions in the history of the British Isles. Post-modern subjectivity, that many African writers of *Bildung* share with writers of *Bildung* from other regions, rather than fret over issues of resistance and authenticity, focuses on a process of self-creation that is composite, conditional, and practical for operating in a global culture that prizes plurality and diversity.

Critics have disagreed vehemently upon the boundaries of the *Bildungsroman* as a genre, with some English literature critics seemingly willing to identify any text demonstrating development as part of the tradition while German specialists have disqualified canonical texts, even the exemplar of the genre, *Wilhelm Meister,* as being part of the form. Frederic Jameson in his 1981 work *The Political Unconsciousness* has even dismissed the genre itself an unhistorical "natural form" (145). Jameson, however, also argues in "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" that one can read these narratives of personal destiny in African texts as national allegories expressing cultural struggle (qtd. in Amoko 197).

I submit that while a text might not qualify as a *Bildungsroman* per se, it may contain an element of *Bildung*, a reflection on a subject's formation in a specific personal and/or cultural context. The power of the *Bildungsroman* read as allegory lies in its perfect marriage of personal perspective and historical moment. Apollo Amoko, in an article entitled "Autobiography and *Bildungsroman* in African literature," largely elides the genres of autobiography and the *Bildungsroman*, pointing out a common process of temporal reversal, in that the future paradoxically comes to be anterior to the past as a subject reflects on his or her own past formation.[37] Amoko focuses on what the African *Bildungsroman* has in common with its European antecedents.

I, on the other hand, am more interested in how particular texts deploy *Bildung* in response to the introduction of modernity through colonialism. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, as

---

[37] Both autobiography and *Bildungsroman* feature a narrator that reflects on his or her own past self and process of formation. The main difference, Amoko argues, is that autobiographies reverse linear temporality explicitly while *Bildungsromane* do so implicitly (206). In *Ten Is the Age of Darkness*, Geta LeSeur makes little distinction between autobiography and the *Bildungsroman*, that she calls at one point, when referring to James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain, "*fictive autobiography" (LeSeur 85).

an early example of the modern post-colonial novel, will provide material to illustrate the

Bildung of an African literary subject and how it communicates strategies of appropriation and

resistance. From there, this essay will identify how *Bildung* is utilized in African novels more

closely identified with the *Bildungsroman* form as identified by Amoko, such as Ngugi wa

Thiong'o's 1964 novel *Weep Not, Child*, and in the third chapter, Tsitsi Dangaremnga's 1988

novel *Nervous Conditions* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2003 novel *Purple Hibiscus*.

To explain the nature of the genre, Amoko's article refers back to Franco Moretti's

argument in *The Way of the World* that the *Bildungsroman* genre is concerned with youth as a

symbol of modernity, "the sign of a world that seeks its meaning in the *future* rather than in the

past" (qtd. in Amoko 199-200). To Moretti, this attention to the mutability and potential of the

Bildungsheld comes from the uncertainty of a world where traditional values were giving way to

modernization, industrialization, urbanization, secularization, and democratization. Amoko

understands the African *Bildungsroman* as focusing on subject formation in an uncertain world, a

novel form that is preoccupied with marking "the death of the father as a symbol of stable,

unquestioned, traditional authority" and the loss of this authority as an assurance of unbroken

and secure continuance (Amoko 200). What is perhaps missing from this critique of the post-

colonial African *Bildungsroman* is the tension between modernity, that rejects traditional

authority, and cultural colonialism, that extols the virtues of the colonizing culture. While major

post-colonial texts almost unequivocally reject cultural colonialism[38] and actually deploy

modernist forms and strategies to critique colonialism, the relationship of these texts to

---

[38] The novels of V.S. Naipaul are a significant exception that springs to mind. *A Bend in the River,* for example, portrays African culture as backward and the rejection of a Western monoculture as disastrous.

modernity itself, that empowers their critiques of the culture of the colonizer and that they cannot escape from, is always ambivalent and complicated.

The movement of the *Bildungsheld* in these texts between metropolitan colonial centers, such as Lagos, Nairobi, and Salisbury/Harare, all of that represent the complicated legacy of colonialism and the site of modern nationalist independence, and the rural village, a touchstone for the individual's authenticity as part of the indigenous culture and the symbol of a simultaneously irretrievable imagined, often idyllic, past, illustrate this fundamental ambivalence. The protagonist's identification with one or the other often suggests a set of allegorical prescriptions for the culture as a whole, and in some texts, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*, there is an obvious polemic strain to the narrative in that modernism, colonialism, and Western culture are conflated, and even anti-colonialist strains of modernism such as Marxism are depicted ambiguously as providing strategies of resistance that do not take into account the fragmentation of indigene Kenyan culture. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, on the other hand, provides a measured consideration of the relationship between modernity and colonialism, a relationship that becomes more tangled over time. While the modern subject in African novels of self-formation shifts over three generations from hope to disillusionment and back again, the sites of contention revolve around three basic themes, that of language and education, gender identity, and the role of religion.

Ngugi's objection to African writers writing primarily in English is well known, and will be discussed later; in contrast, Achebe's writings, starting with *Things Fall Apart*, frequently suggest that the African subject must master the language of a cosmopolitan Other not just to engage with alien cultures, but to discover pleasure and understanding in the poetics of every culture. In his memoir, *There Was a Country*, Achebe describes the practical value of English as

a unifying language when he discusses his education at Umuahia, explaining that without a mastery of English, communication between and among students and teachers from Nigeria's over 250 different ethnic groups, each with its own dialect, would be impossible (25). In addition to practical communication, Achebe mentions in his memoir a mistranslation of an Igbo word into English that, while meaning "strength," can also mean "buttocks," a bit of humor only someone conversant with both languages can fully appreciate (*Country* 11), and he likes the juxtaposition well enough that he replicates the lexical confusion between "self" and "buttocks" in a scene in *Things Fall Apart* (144-5). The joy of wordplay that the audience experiences in this scene results not simply from their contempt at the emissary's mistranslation, of language functioning as a tool of instruction and command, but also from their enjoyment of the juxtaposition of signs. In this particular scene, the missionary visiting Mbanta is less threatening after the massacre at Abame due to his linguistic missteps, and where the people of Mbanta at first fear what the missionary will say, they eventually become more inquisitive than guarded. One even playfully mocks the missionary's faltering speech. The later conversation between the restrained missionary Mr. Brown and Akunna is also characterized by exchanges that lead to neither succeeding in converting the other but do result in them learning more about each other's beliefs (179). Power taints these cultural exchanges when a character, such as Okonkwo or Reverend Smith, attempts to enforce his will on others, but other scenes of cultural contact are marked by linguistic playfulness or curiosity, such as the conversation between Mr. Brown and Akunna.

These scenes are not always perceived as exhibiting the potential of language to transcend violent differences. Julian Wasserman argues that the confusion over "self" and "buttocks" alludes to a breakdown in communication between missionaries and indigenous

peoples as well as between natives of the region, leading to what he sees as the complete collapse

of Umuofia before the colonizers at the end of the book (Wasserman 78). Lloyd Brown notes

that the seemingly benevolent Reverend Brown only engages with Akunna to "destroy" Igbo

culture (Brown 30). The critic Brown may be doing the character of the same name a disservice

due to Achebe's use of the term "frontal attack" in describing Brown's approach to conversion.

Brown's "frontal attack" is his earlier conversation with Akunna in that he tries to convince the

Igbo elder that their religions differ on two counts while Akunna maintains that their beliefs are

identical. The first count involves Brown claiming the Igbo "worship" material things, such as a

piece of carved wood, as gods, and Akunna counters that material objects are all interconnected

through a single higher power. The second claim Brown makes is that the Igbo fear their creator

while the god of Christianity is not an object of fear. Akunna counters that one must always fear

a higher power if one fails to do its will, and there is no way of knowing the will of this higher

power. Brown does not refute Akunna's counter-points, implying that he may agree with

Akunna's assessment, but for reasons of his own, he insists on stating their cultural differences.

When direct claims to the Igbo leaders fail, Brown establishes a school. It is possible to take

Brown at face value when he argues, "If Umuofia failed to send her children to the school,

strangers would come from other places to rule them" (181). The narrator, who states that

strangers are already attempting to rule Umuofia through the Native Court and the D.C. in

Umuru (ibid), supports Brown's argument.

While Brown clearly is interested in converting as many people in Umuofia to his

religion as possible, as in many colonized regions, the interests of the missionaries and those of

the colonial government do not always coincide and are often at odds. Brown appears to be

arming Umuofia for a future conflict in this "new dispensation" even while challenging its

72

traditions. Although Brown's approach to cultural contact between the British and the Igbo involves an educational regimen that privileges English, literacy, and Christianity while not necessarily excluding traditional Igbo practices and beliefs (after all, he does restrain the more zealous members of his flock, like Enoch), he is more than countered by extremists for and against modernization that drive the crisis brought on by contact toward violent conflict.

C.L. Innes, in discussing *Things Fall Apart,* sees characters such as Okonkwo and the zealous missionary Mr. Smith, as well as the District Commissioner, as akin to each other in their refusal to understand the Other by their contempt for the poetic as a vehicle for reuniting the abstractions of communication to the reality of experience (Innes 122-125). Achebe extends this position of empowerment for those at this linguistic crossroads to the cultural crossroads where he finds himself. He describes how his position is as an artist brought up to embrace Christianity while appreciating the rich animistic religion of his neighbors and extended family, and he attributes his artistic successes to this dual tradition (*Country* 11-13). While Achebe's personal story is one of survival and empowerment through cultural hybridity, *Things Fall Apart* is a story of those who do not survive; the protagonist of the novel, Okonkwo, rejects all those elements of indigenous Igbo culture that might help him navigate the changes wrought by colonial modernization. Both the music his father loved and the proverbs his son Nwoye cherishes he scorns as womanly while embracing the most combative and unyielding ideal of Igbo masculinity available, an understanding of nature ironically framed in Achebe's novel using Tennyson's phrase "red in tooth and claw" (13) that admits neither compromise nor defeat. This *Bildung*, this process of personal formation built on a strict sense of gender identity that comes to represent cultural identity for Okonkwo, charts a tragic course in the novel that leads to the ambiguous resolution. Okonkwo is responsible for his own dark fate, one leading not just to self-

destruction but also to the same kind of abomination that his father was guilty of (both Okonkwo and his father suffer unclean deaths and their corpses are exempt from proper burial). He also suffers an ignominious legacy, as his resistance becomes a footnote in an anthropological work by the District Commissioner that denigrates his people (208-9). There is a sense that this ending is unnecessary. Okonkwo is not a victim of white colonialism. Although his courage is inspiring, his lack of wisdom inspires pathos. His example is somehow both cautionary and empowering.

An alternative model of a modern African *Bildungsheld* is Njoroge, the main character of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*. Unlike the narrator of *Things Fall Apart*, Ngugi's narrator in *Weep Not Child* is more reflective when it comes to the text's protagonist, more judgmental of his actions, and more didactic. The tone of some passages describing Njoroge's naïve enthusiasm for learning in the midst of internecine violence is almost scornful at times. For example, after the white District Officer Mr. Howlands tortures Njoroge, and the young Kenyan begins to realize his innocence and optimism do not merit him better treatment at the hands of the colonizers, the narrator relates a moment from Njoroge's past:

> Njoroge had always been a dreamer, a visionary who consoled himself faced by the difficulties of the moment by a look at a better day to come. Before he started school, he had once been lent to his distant uncle to help him in looking after cattle. The cattle had troubled him much. But instead of crying like other children, he had sat on a tree and wished he had been at school…Meanwhile the cattle had eaten a good portion of a *shamba* and his uncle had to send him home immediately (120).

The ruin of the young protagonist's dream of a British education is depicted as more pathetic than tragic. David Carroll, in a book on Achebe, compares Okonkwo to Hardy's

74

character Henchard from *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Carroll 62-63), and at times it feels as if

Ngugi is satirizing another character of Hardy's in Njoroge: Jude from *Jude the Obscure*. The

nadir of *Jude*, the complete wreck of the main character's life, is the murder-suicide by hanging

of Jude and Sue's children by "Little Father Time," the neglected product of Jude's first marriage

to Arabella, followed by the separation of Jude and Sue as they effectively exchange each other's

religious convictions. Njoroge and his love interest, Mwihaki, also experience a tragic reversal;

while Mwihaki tries to convince Njoroge to leave Kenya with her to escape the violence of the

Mau-Mau Rebellion prior to the murder of her father, Njoroge approaches her with the same plan

following his arrest and torture and finds that she is now unwilling to leave the country. After

Njoroge realizes that, due to his family's involvement with the rebels, there is no chance he will

be able to return to school, and he is rebuffed by Mwihaki and cannot focus on working at a

menial retail job, Njoroge attempts to hang himself (reminiscent of Jude's son and Okonkwo) out

of a sense of masculine pride, but is stopped by his mother. The last scene of the book seems a

deliberate echo of Ngugi's novelistic predecessors, but instead of a dramatic death, Ngugi

emasculates his protagonist. This possible element of satire pervading the development of

Njoroge as a character can be read as part of Ngugi's broader campaign against Western

assimilation in his writings.

Weep Not, Child is essentially a study in the *Bildung* of a child alienated from his own

culture, an illustration of the cultural sickness haunting Kenya's missionary schools. Ngugi

outlines this campaign most forcefully and coherently in *Decolonizing the Mind*. His central

objection to the English education that his character Njoroge yearns for is that the language, as a

carrier of a foreign culture, presents terms that solely reflect the experiences of the colonizer. It

not only bears no connection to the everyday life of a (in his case) Agĩkũyũ peasant family, but

also disrupts the connection between language and lived experience, resulting in "the

disassociation of the sensibility of [an Agĩkũyũ child] from his natural and social environment,

what we might call colonial alienation" (*Decolonizing the Mind* 17).[39] In *Decolonizing the Mind,*

Ngugi discusses how his upbringing at home and in the fields taught him an appreciation of the

Gĩkũyũ language and oral tradition of stories. He describes his formal education in English as

deliberately effacing his connection to his indigenous language and peasant life. He treats these

as reflections of each other, and describes how imperialism created a system that punished the

speaking of Gĩkũyũ and rewarded achievement in English, to the extent that mastery of English

in the colonial schools became more important than proficiency in any other subject. In *Weep*

Not, Child, Ngugi illustrates this break from an idyllic, pastoral life of telling stories in Gĩkũyũ

around the campfire,[40] relating an Agĩkũyũ creation story that establishes their claim and

stewardship over the land, to the pleasant academic fantasies of escape from struggle that

Njoroge enjoys while learning English.

---

[39] Thiong'o is not alone in this position, of course. Rotimi Omoyele Fasan, in "Mapping Nigerian Literature," mentions Nigerian critic Ernest Emenyonu's position in *The Rise and Development of Igbo Literature* as being similar to Thiong'o's stance, as well as a scholar of Yoruba oral literature, Ropo Sekoni, and before them, Obianjulu Wali. There is a strong tradition of resistance to English and promotion of indigenous languages not just in Nigerian and Kenyan literature, but in the entirety of the region. Thiong'o is the best-known and most eloquent voice for this position.

[40] In two essays from *The Education of a British-Protected Child,* Achebe defends a colonial education in English against "historical fantasy," alluding to Thiong'o in general in one essay and naming him specifically in another. In "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration," Achebe writes, "Some of my colleagues…have tried to rewrite their story into a straightforward case of oppression by presenting a happy monolingual African childhood brusquely disrupted by the imposition of a domineering foreign language" (119). He responds specifically to Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind* in "Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature," with affection and good humor tinged with a trace of sarcasm, boiling down their dispute by saying, "Theatricalities aside, the difference between Ngũgĩ and myself on the issue of indigenous or European languages for African writers is that while Ngũgĩ *now* believes it is *either/or*, I have always thought it was *both*" (96-7).

The theoretical underpinnings of Ngugi's analysis of the "colonial alienation" he describes through Njoroge's development are Marxist.[41] Marx, in turn, inherits his conception of language from the English Romantic tradition that was influenced by J.G. Herder's theory of *Volksstimme*, that culture and language are "the outward expression of the inner essence of a nation or people" (Dowling 15). This Romantic assessment of language was used as a modern tool to interrogate the religious theory of language as *logos* that predated it, the metaphysical union of signifier and signified, but in turn, it supposes a unity of speech with nature and positions written language as decadent and artificial. The narrator of *Weep Not, Child* which we may imagine, if we are willing, as a wiser, more cynical Njoroge who is looking back on his development sees the white landowner Howlands as exploiting Njoroge's father Ngotho's connection to the land because his own culture is bankrupt and meaningless. Ngugi describes Howlands as loving "to see Ngotho working in the farm: the way the old man touched the soil, almost fondling, and the way he tended the young tea plants as if they were his own… Ngotho was too much of a part of the farm to be separated from it" (30).

When filtered through the lens of Howlands's sensibilities, however, Ngotho's stewardship that the white settler admires so much becomes imperialistic: "Both men admired

---

[41] In "The Engaged Artist: The Social Vision of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o," D. Salituma Wamalwa enthusiastically details Thiong'o's emphasis on the place of ideology, specifically Marxist dialectical materialism, both in his creative works and in his ideology and describes the dictum "art for art's sake" as alien to Ngugi's thinking (11). Wamalwa regards Ngugi's first three novels and his first play, his "early" writings prior to him changing his name from James Ngugi, as existing prior to Ngugi's articulation in *Writers in Politics* of his art as "a community wrestling with its total environment to produce the basic means of life… and, in the process, creating and recreating itself in history." While Ngugi was less radical in 1962 when he wrote *Weep Not, Child,* and he does not explicitly valorize militant figures in the novel like Boro, I still contend that the novel's treatment of Njoroge displays, if not hostility toward the colonized intellectual, at least a very deep ambivalence about the kind of assimilation Njoroge values, treating it as little more than sophisticated escapism.

this *shamba*. For Ngotho felt responsible for whatever happened to this land. He owed it to the dead, the living and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over this *shamba*. Mr. Howlands always felt a certain amount of victory whenever he walked through it all. He alone was responsible for taming this unoccupied wildness" (31). In the critical terminology of Hegelian/Marxist dialectic, Howlands is the lord, estranged from the land due to his removal from physical labor, simultaneously oppressing and envying his bondsman's sense of connection and purpose. Furthermore, Howlands's war (i.e. British involvement in World War II) has killed both Howlands's and Ngotho's sons, but in the text, Ngotho places involvement in the war squarely on Howlands's shoulders. European culture, and its decadent ideology of dominance and violent conflict, are removed from natural life and constitute a disruption in the healthy development of the Agĩkũyũ, both individually and as a people. Despite the general indictment of English language and culture, the thrust of Ngugi's critique comes from an ideological base that combines Romantic philology and Marxist philosophy and is itself part of the modern English tradition. To Ngugi, European language and culture in the novel is like a disease, excepting those critical tools that aid in diagnosis and cure.[42] Where and how Ngugi draws the line between culture as oppressive and culture as liberatory seems to be in the distinction

---

[42] In his descriptions of the socialists from Nairobi who call for a strike, the narrator of *Weep Not, Child* lets a thread of ambivalence creep into his descriptions through the voice of the collaborator Jacobo. Jacobo speaks in front of the workers planning to strike and suggests that the people from Nairobi organizing the strike have nothing to lose while workers such as Ngotho are taking all the risks. As when his wife suggests he cannot take chances by supporting the strike, Ngotho's anger gets the better of him, and the older man advances on Jacobo to assault him and sparks a riot (53, 58-59). Later, the text describes a "disillusioned government official" experiencing the pangs of Kipling's white man's burden as he reflects on how their greatest success at modernization in Kenya, Nairobi, has become a center of anti-colonial unrest. While the Agĩkũyũ creation myth, with its subsequent prophecy of liberation, may provide characters like Ngotho with a vision of an independent Kenya, it is the socialist agitators from Nairobi that give expression to the Agĩkũyũ people's anger and resentment.

between the forms and language of culture as opposed to the concepts they represent, but his overall assessment appears to be that any cultural exchange is either one or the other and never both at once, never ambivalent, syncretic, or eclectic.

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi hints at even more dramatic parallels between the damage of European imperialism and the impact of European language, at one point writing, "How did we arrive as this acceptance of 'the fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature', in our culture and in our politics? What was the route from Berlin of 1884 via the Makerere of 1962 to what is still the prevailing and dominant logic a hundred years later?" (9). The depiction of the colonial partition of Africa in Berlin and the conference on African literature at Makerere as both part of a continuum of unbroken cultural assimilation[43] does not seem to admit to any hybridity or cultural exchange that is not inflected by the imposition of power. Ngugi argues that the petty bourgeoisie in Africa is split between the comprador bourgeoisie, those who seek permanent alliance with imperial powers, and the nationalistic or patriotic bourgeoisie that seek some kind of economic and political independence, suggesting that African literatures utilizing a European language at first strengthen the claims of the nationalistic bourgeoisie, but that these literatures later lent legitimacy to the comprador bourgeoisie when they came to power by strengthening their links to neocolonial regimes. The petty bourgeoisie, Ngugi relates, found that their use of the language of the colonizer cut them off from the working classes and the peasantry and credits the working classes with adapting European languages to suit their needs.[44] He then describes African

---

[43] Referring to the conference, Thiong'o writes in *Decolonizing the Mind*, "It is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues" (20).

[44] Thiong'o argues that the working classes Africanized these languages "without any of the respect for its ancestry shown by Senghor and Achebe, so totally as to have created new African

writers in European languages, even those (or perhaps especially those) who intermix indigenous

African language and culture into their narratives, as not writing authentic African literature.

"What we have created instead," he concludes, "is another hybrid tradition, a tradition in

transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature; that is, the

literature written by Africans in European languages" (21-7).

Ngugi thus charts one of two contemporary currents in African literature in general and in

the African *Bildungsroman* in particular. One is a tradition of resistance, dating from the

disillusionment of African writers in the troubled aftermath of colonial independence, a tradition

that sees European cultural elements as disrupting the natural development of the African subject

and looks toward the restoration of an idyllic pre-colonial past. The second, still to be discussed

in chapter three, understands African literature (and, indeed, postmodern literature as a whole) as

a hybrid that draws strength from both European and indigenous traditions and challenges both

the bigotry of Western imperialism and Ngugi's own description of Afro-European literature as a

"minority tradition."[45]

---

languages, such as Krio in Sierra Leone or Pidgin in Nigeria, that owed their identities to the
syntax and rhythms of African languages" (23).

[45] While I read Ngugi's emphasis on an indigenous language literature as dismissive of pluralism
and harshly polemical in *Decolonizing the Mind,* critic Joseph McLaren sees Ngugi in his later
work *Moving the Centre* as promoting the kind of Afrocentricity espoused by Molefi Kete
Asante, a theory grounded in "the notion of multiple centers and the validity of these various
locations as long as they do not lead to cultural dominance" (389), quoting Ngugi as writing that
problems in cross-cultural exchange only arose "when people tried to use the vision from any
one centre and generalize it as the universal reality" (4). McLaren's reading of Ngugi suggests
that the Kenyan author is in favor of a cultural pluralism with multiple linguistic centers akin to
Asante's advancement of American Ebonics, but cites Asante as arguing that Marxism as a
worldview is too Eurocentric, too materialistic, and too willing to sacrifice harmony to achieve
progress in order to advance an Afrocentric theory of literature.

CHAPTER THREE

FEMINIST *BILDUNGSROMANE* IN ZIMBABWE AND NIGERIA

In the last chapter, I discussed two contemporary currents in modern African literature, a tradition of resistance and one of hybridity. One should not mistake this trend as a reaction or counter to anti-colonial texts, however. Even though some critics might choose to read African narratives that refrain from a strong refutation of imperialist culture as assimilationist, there is frequently, at the very least, an implicit critique of imperialism at the heart of African texts written in the language of the colonizer. The difference between these two currents is the rejection in the later of the goal of pre-independent African existence. Instead, this second mode of African literature, and specifically African *Bildung,* recognizes that African culture intersects with global Western culture, and African literature with European-language literary traditions, at too many points to be disentangled easily or in the near future.

This second mode of African *Bildung* draws on a feminist tradition specific to minority women in order to study this intersection of languages and cultures in the African subject. In a section of *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English* entitled "Rewriting Her Story: Nation and Gender," C.L. Innes emphasizes the image of 'Mother Africa,' of woman as symbolic of the pre-colonial African state, in the writings of writers such as Kofi Awoonor, Camara Laye, Léopold Senghor, and Wole Soyinka, as well as female writers like Buchi Emecheta. Emecheta even wrote "the white female intellectuals may still have to come to the

womb of Mother Africa to re-learn how to be a woman."[46] African women often became the site of contestation between indigenous men and colonists, and Innes quotes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as writing that imperialists frequently validated their rule by arguing that Europeans had a duty to protect native women from the 'barbaric' customs of native men.[47]

Innes points out that even those male writers who maintain a healthy skepticism about literary yearnings for Africa's unblemished past before the arrival of the Europeans often invoke imagery that associates women with Africa as a whole. She argues that Chinua Achebe intends for the nationalist leader Cool Max's poem in *A Man of the People* as a parody of *négritude's* tendency to anthropomorphize the continent as a "lovely mother" who must be redeemed after being "raped and plundered." Achebe's plot revolves around rival politicians that woo three different women, each of whom can be interpreted as standing in for three different kinds of voters (an older rural woman, a young, sophisticated urbanite, and an innocent village girl) (Innes 143). Innes frames the problem of this depiction by illustrating how anticolonialist rhetoric draws on gendered images to counter imperialist images that draw a parallel between the relationships of the colonizer and colonized and a father and his children (Innes 139). If the imperial nation is a father to his children, justifying colonialism through patriarchy, the counter-discourse from the margin often resorts to images of the colonized nation as abused mother that her children must redeem. What is lost in this discourse are women as specific subjects, who in the masculine rhetoric of anti-colonial resistance are symbolically either abused spouses, meekly submitting to their abuser and neglectful toward their children, or creatures without agency in

---

[46] She is quoted by Innes on page 138, but the passage comes from a piece Emecheta wrote called "Culture Conflict" for *New Society* in 1984.

[47] The passage is lifted from Spivak's germinal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

need of rescue.[48]

    With the spread of feminism across the globe, however, female writers begin to

recuperate feminine subjects from the literary toolboxes of their male counterparts. Innes

mentions the Nigerian writer Flora Nwapa, who in the sixties and seventies, built upon Chinua

Achebe's inspiring example but pushed her female characters to the foreground of the novel.

Quoting fellow critic Elleke Boehmer, Innes argues that Nwapa uses choric language to

empower her female characters, and that this serves "to disperse portrayals of mothers as

symbols of the nation or tradition and replace them with women who are active participants in

and makers of community life; no longer seen as metaphoric, they take on metonymic roles,

specific and continuous" (Innes 147). Despite these strides, Innes mentions that Nwapa

sometimes still resorts to mythic imagery when characterizing her female characters, and critics

dismissed her work as lacking plot that, Innes suggests, is because her characters did not engage

in the same kind of heroic masculine action as Achebe's characters; the perception was that her

female characters' concerns were "mere gossip" (*ibid*).

    As Carol Hanisch wrote in 1970, the personal is political, but it was not until the

publication of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* in the late eighties that this was widely

accepted in a narrative about an African family without overt political allegory. As Innes notes,

Nervous Conditions is a historical novel that does not acknowledge Zimbabweans'' struggle for

independence, but instead deals with the economic and psychological consequences of

colonialism among the women of a Zimbabwean family. Dangarembga's preoccupation in the

novel, rather than the historical details of the conflict, is how, according to Innes, "In a colonial

---

[48] Innes mentions Mumbi and Wanja in Ngugi wa Thiong'o *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, respectively, and Iriyesi in Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomie* as examples of how these writers use female characters as allegories for the nation (Innes 140).

society where economic and social status is associated with Western acculturation and the ability to impersonate a white male, the black female is doubly disadvantaged" (Innes 149). In the novel, the *Bildungsheld*, Tambudzai Sigauke, or Tambu, must wait until her brother dies for any economic or educational opportunities, and then she essentially becomes a surrogate son. Tambu learns to see village life with her family as limited and learns to emulate her successful, London-educated uncle, Babamukuru. Dangarembga followed *Nervous Conditions*, that told the story of Tambu's childhood with *The Book of Not,* a novel about the same character's adolescence. Both provide interesting insights into the nature of post-colonial and feminist African literary subjectivity, so I will consider each novel in turn to demonstrate how it builds upon my posited tradition of African *Bildung*.

Dangarembga draws on a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre of *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon, a primary source for Ngugi's critique of psychological colonization, for the title of *Nervous Conditions*. In her hands the troubled development of her character Nyasha, as recorded by her narrator Tambu, is not only the symptom of cultural colonization but also the byproduct of a culture that reinforces a dominant patriarchy that runs deeper than the power structures associated with class and nation.[49] Tambu herself experiences the stresses of patriarchy, colonialism, and Western modernism, and while Nyasha's resistance to her father Babamukuru's advocacy of Western education and values is dramatic in the novel, and Tambu's assimilation of

---

[49] In 1993, Dangarembga said in an interview, "I have come a long way in my thinking from really dichotomizing the issue or dividing up the world by gender, because you cannot ignore the other powers that really inform life itself" (George and Scott 313). To Dangarembga, Western socialism or feminism alone cannot cure what ails Zimbabwe's women because their problems are too complex and interrelated to fit within the neat, reductive framework presented by these two ideologies as they existed at the time.

his culture is subtle. I consider each character in contrast to the other and within the context of the community of women that Dangarembga creates within the novel.

We shall also first consider how African literary critics have defended Dangarembga's emphasis on the personal over the overtly political in this novel. Dangarembga's feminist critique of power builds on and goes beyond Fanon's (and Ngugi's) analysis of the psychological impact of culture in colonialism. Her study of the legacy of modernism and Western education in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) is more ambivalent and more nuanced than these earlier works.[50] In his 2004 introduction to the novel, Kwame Anthony Appiah lists three ways in that *Nervous*

---

[50] This change may be understood in part by drawing upon the model of first, second, and third generation Nigerian literature as outlined by Fasan in "Mapping Nigerian Literature." While Zimbabwe's situation is materially different from Nigeria's, the successive generations might be used as a rough model for broad changes in regional literatures in English from various African countries. Fasan characterizes first wave literature in the 1960s as generating counter-discourses to colonialism and racist representations of Africans, developing ties to other black regional literatures through the Negritude movement, drawing romantic and uncritical portraits of Nigeria's pre-colonial past and later, focusing on issues of governance and corruption (39). He describes the second generation of literature from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s as socially-relevant, highly critical and often of a Marxist-proletarian bent, as well as accessible to a broad audience. To Fasan, the third generation of Nigerian literature, from the mid-1990s to the present, dwells on "the structural and economic disjunctions that characterize military rule" and are far more experimental in style than earlier generations. While Kenya did not suffer from a large-scale civil war like Nigeria, it did experience a period of civil violence and undemocratic rule under President Moi in the 1980s, and after Zimbabwe's civil war following the unilateral declaration of independence of 1965 that only ended in independence after 1979, Zimbabwe has experienced thirty years of absolute rule under Mugabe. Recent literature by Kenyans has taken stock of the country's troubles stemming from colonialism and a troubled independence (e.g. Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust* covers 60 years of Kenyan history), and Rino Zhuwarara of the University of Zimbabwe has identified the country's national literature as dealing with either its pre-colonial past or the legacy of the long war of liberation against the white Rhodesian settlers under Ian Smith. The shift is from a pre-colonial approach, analogous to Nigeria's first generation literature, to one preoccupied with post-independence during the Cold War and afterwards, comparable to the second and third generation. Ngugi invented a similar sequence of "stages" within African literature that he explains in "Writing Against Colonialism," including an age of anti-colonial struggle, an age of independence, and an age of neo-colonialism (92). Both Achebe and Ngugi are concerned with creating counter-discourses and counter-representations of colonialism while Dangarembga and later Adichie re-evaluate the tradition these earlier writers established.

Conditions responds to criticism that it is not an authentic African novel, implicitly replying to Ngugi Thiong'o's challenge that Anglophone African literature is a minor European tradition. This supports my argument that Dangarembga's feminist narrative signifies a break with the political oppositional subjectivity of Ngugi's that is mired in an inauthentic colonized self and ideal liberated and authentic indigene self.

First, Appiah indicates that the novel explodes Ngugi's vision of the African village as idyllic and free from cultural oppression by pointing out that Tambu's privileged, male chauvinist brother Nhamo does not learn to be abusive when he goes to school in distant Umtali town, he merely broadens the focus of his scorn. Appiah notes, "There her brother learns to despise the village, just as he had learned in the village to despise his sisters" (*Nervous Conditions* vii). Second, Appiah notes that Tambu's modern Western education causes her to struggle "to integrate the moral order of her village upbringing with a constantly growing sense of the injustice of her position as a woman" (*ibid* viii). This education structures the older Tambu-as-narrator's reflections on her past self's struggles and allows her to describe petty disputes and cruelties such as her brother's theft of her mealies that she planned to pay for school with as symptoms of a larger system of oppression. It also gives her the language and ability to assess the negative impact of the West's emphasis on perfect female beauty on her cousin, Nyasha. Third, Appiah responds to the suggestion at the very least implicit in Ngugi's writings that all African literature written in English is primarily addressed to a Western reader, a 'safari moment' for the moral and literary tourist, by pointing out that the narrator, the older, self-reflective Tambu, does not provide explanatory glosses for Shona terms, that the tone of her descriptions is not always friendly to the Western reader, and that the central moral issue of the

novel, how to escape oppression as a woman and as a black person, is not a primary concern for the majority of Western readers (*Nervous Conditions* ix-x).

The first-person narrator of *Nervous Conditions* does not suggest a return to the past, but rather looks at the past to assess her present identity and explain the germinal moment in her life and her reaction to it, expressed in the first line of the novel: "I was not sorry when my brother died." Where Ngugi envisions a trajectory of development tainted by the imposition of a foreign culture, Dangarembga describes gendered oppression that pervades both the culture of the Shona in her protagonist's home village and the Westernized family of her uncle, Babamukuru.[51] As Appiah notes, Tambu's brother Nhamo learns from his father, Jeremiah, to hold his sisters in contempt, and then later, when he is given educational opportunities denied to Tambu, he learns to scorn Shona village life more generally. Likewise, Tambu experiences the misogyny of her father and brother as a child, but she doesn't encounter racism until she goes with her teacher Mr. Matimba to Umtali (*Nervous Conditions* 27-9). On one hand, Tambu contends with her uncle's "soft" misogyny, an exaggerated authority bolstered by his Western education that prompts him to relegate his equally well-educated wife Maiguru to a lesser role in both the family and the school they administer together as well as oppress his daughter for "scandalous" behavior he ignores in his son. On the other, she experiences little direct contact with the racism

---

[51] There are critics who have argued that gendered oppression has accompanied and been instituted in colonized regions through the political oppression of imperialism. Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* describes the feminization of men in India as a way of negating their political identities (8), and W.E.B. Du Bois, in *Darkwater,* implies that the degradation of black women is part of a specific program in Africa and the American South to emasculate the black man (74). While critics have raised the possibility that misogyny in colonized communities manifests as a reassertion of masculinity by male victims of colonialism, there is nothing in the text of *Nervous Conditions* to indicate that male chauvinism is indigenous to the Shona community or imposed through cultural imperialism. It is simply a fact of life with that Tambu and the other female characters must contend.

of white settlers until the very end of the novel when she leaves her uncle's house in Umtali to stay at Sacred Heart, the Catholic mission where she will be educated by nuns, and finds the dormitories are segregated (*Nervous Conditions* 198).

Racism is a distant secondary concern in Tambu's childhood. The effects of colonialism and racism are felt without being seen for the majority of the novel. Instead, what takes center-stage is the complicated relationship between Western culture and patriarchy, how 1960's education and culture in the novel's Rhodesia reinforces gendered power and at the same time provides a framework for challenging it through the introduction of the second-wave feminism of the 60s.

Dangarembga's vision of *Bildung* differs from Ngugi's in that the personal events, the cultural experiences that make up the development of the colonized subject, that Ngugi describes in *Weep Not, Child* are expressions of an oppositional theory that precludes the hybrid as auxiliary to the colonizer, a traitorous factor in the conflict between colonial entrenchment and resistance. Meanwhile, in Dangarembga's novel, the framework of feminist resistance to patriarchy provides a context for understanding Tambu's story. The moments that the novel focuses on the horrible effects of colonization do not attribute the oppression to a simple and discrete dichotomy between colonizer and colonized, male and female, but instead show oppression and resistance as occurring at the confluence of myriad ideological discourses. Tambu-as-narrator looks back on a past self who is flawed, at times too unaware and at times too timid. The men in her story are spoiled and petty, but they are not monsters, and Tambu's exemplar of the patriarchy, her uncle Babamukuru, is at his worst when he is trying to do his best. Likewise, Dangarembga's women may hold the moral high ground because their struggle is

just, but when they fail, the narrator can often attribute that failure to limitations of development in the women themselves.

Rather than the conflict in the novel pointing toward some historical event like the Mau-Mau Rebellion or hinting at the bitter sterility of the colonized intellectual, the efforts of the women in the novel to liberate their minds and their bodies serve as models for the narrator that shape her personal development. Tambu does not pine for a pre-colonial past or opposition to various forms of racial and gendered oppression. The heart of Tambu's development in *Nervous Conditions* is her identification with and dialogue with other women in the novel. Elleke Boehmer, in *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*, discusses the ubiquity of "pairings" of female characters in novels by African women (Boehmer 182). Innes applies this dynamic specifically to *Nervous Conditions*, summarizing Boehmer's point that the relationship between Tambu and Nyasha can

> Be read in terms of the paradigm of same-sex love, an awareness and understanding of each other's bodies, a relationship in which 'the cousins' mutual discovery and exploration is specifically realized through their bodily proximity and mutual bodily awareness… these pairings are also a means of establishing women's roles as metonymic rather than symbolic; as 'split selves' Tambu and Nyasha (and Tambu and Lucia) indicate the variety of roles and choices each woman may or may not seek to follow (Innes 150).

My initial reading of the text saw these women as models for Tambu's development, but building on Boehmer and Innes here, I want to stress before I continue that these "models" are in no way archetypes, symbols, or classes of the feminine. They are particular and specific subjects

89

who offer Tambu a variety of strategies for dealing with the other members of her family and perhaps of escaping their fates.

Despite Tambu's overwhelming desire to please her uncle Babamukuru, the true focus of the novel is the women, both educated and rustic, in her life who provide her with different models for the development of her identity, including her mother, Mainini, her maternal aunt, Lucia, the wife of her paternal uncle, Maiguru, and her cousin, Nyasha. While Mainini is trapped serving her domineering, shiftless, philandering husband in the village, Maiguru is equally trapped, an educated woman forced to defer to her authoritarian and ambitious husband, and each illustrates a fate both Tambu and Nyasha wish to avoid. In turn, both Lucia and Nyasha rebel against the double constraints put upon them, first as subjects to a racist colonial system, but second as women whose behavior and opportunities are curtailed and controlled by the men in their lives. In the opening paragraph of the novel, Tambu-as-narrator comments that both Lucia and she escape, but that Nyasha's rebellion, in the end, may not have been successful. Lucia succeeds in using her sexuality to her advantage to mock the patriarchy bent on controlling her actions, exposing the men's sexual hypocrisy, but when Babamukuru offers to use his influence to provide her with limited educational and employment opportunities and when she realizes she can help her suffering sister by safeguarding Jeremiah and Takesure's dignity, she reverts to the traditional Shona ideal of the self-contained, deferential woman (Shaw 11; *Nervous* 158-162, 189). The other women frequently look to Lucia for inspiration, and even Babamukuru admires her when she criticizes him (174), but Lucia is ultimately limited by her poverty and profound lack of education. Nyasha serves an example of the path Tambu might have taken perhaps if she had not been born into poverty and learned to fight her family's sexism at a young age. The burdens placed on Tambu by her birth and gender complicate her development. In contrast,

Shona traditions Nyasha cannot fathom and colonial ideologies that she has no control over undermine her ability to create herself.

In the essay "'You Had a Daughter, but I Am Becoming a Woman': Sexuality, Feminism, and Postcoloniality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's 'Nervous Conditions' and 'She No Longer Weeps,'" Carolyn Martin Shaw compares feminist themes in the novel and the play to illuminate Nyasha's development. Shaw argues that the struggles of Nyasha and Martha, the protagonist of the play, reflect a disappointment that the promise of women's emancipation manifested in the passage of the Legal Age of Majority Act, that granted women in Zimbabwe the right to marry on their own, represent their own interests in court, and take custody of their own children, did not result in newly independent women being honored as cultural pioneers, but instead led to popular resentment (Shaw 8). This empowerment is embodied in the novel by Lucia's powerful sexuality and Nyasha's own burgeoning sexual interest that her father tries to control because it, and Nyasha's expressed desire to determine right from wrong without worrying about public censure, violates the emphasis on female restraint and subservience in Shona culture and reminds Babamukuru of his own investment in colonialism (Shaw 11). Nyasha espouses Western independence of thought and education to please her father, but her mature embrace of these ideals that prompt her to do things that might embarrass him in the Shona community, to stay out late with a young man or read D.H. Lawrence, for example, also displease him. Shaw argues that Nyasha's bulimia, anorexia, and nervous breakdown, all attacks on her own body, are the result of her desire to prevent her own development into a mature woman (Shaw 9). This interruption of her development is the result of what Gayatri Spivak has called "epistemic violence" in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Nyasha's objectification and Othering prevent her from furthering the formation of a mature self.

91

C.L. Innes also points out that even though both male and female characters in *Nervous Conditions* are subject to the pressure to behave in certain ways or play a particular role, that for the women in the novel, this pressure is strongly associated with the consumption or refusal of food. She writes, "The effects of colonialism and neocolonialism are expressed in terms of an assault on the body, a condition that is internalized and becomes indistinguishable from the daily cycle of consumption, digestion, and evacuation. In this novel the double colonization to which women are subjected is also experienced as a rejection of the female body by men" (Innes 151). Dangarembga extends this theme into the novel's sequel, *The Book of Not* as well, as when the members of the "African dormitory" are collectively punished for backing up their antique plumbing due to improperly disposing of their sanitary napkins and when Tambu is specifically criticized for using the toilet connected to one of the dormitories at Sacred Heart occupied by the daughters of white Rhodesians (*Book* 62-73). The decisive expression of this connection between gendered oppression and the female body in *Nervous Conditions* is when Nyasha has a nervous breakdown and tears pages from her history book. Lacking the words to articulate her feelings of helplessness at being subject both to racial pressures and her father's expectations for her gender, Nyasha responds by venting her outrage upon her own body.

Tambu, on the other hand, is not moved to the same extremes of behavior as Nyasha although there are moments that she seems sympathetic toward her cousin. Returning to Shaw for a moment, she sees Tambu as developing an "indigenous feminism" although poor and educated, that she appears skeptical of (Shaw 14), but she may be missing the fact that Tambu's analysis of the patriarchy, of even her use of the feminist term, derives from Tambu-as-narrator rather than Tambu as *Bildungsheld,* the object of the narrative. The *Bildungsroman* form, utilizing Amoko's definition of the genre in Africa as future anterior narration, allows a subject

to reevaluate his or her development in a new ideological context. Both Achebe and Ngugi employ elements of the *Bildung* form to place the raw material of a subject's development, through the device of a retrospective narrative, into an ideological framework. In addition to what these authors do with the genre, Dangarembga uses Tambu-as-narrator reflecting on Tambu-as-subject, or Nyasha-as-model-of-development, to illustrate how her *Bildungsheld's* limited access to a critical understanding of the ideological discourses associated with race and gender generate internalized conflict. Tambu suffers as much as Nyasha from her inability to express her mutual desire to please Babamukuru and her resentment of his championing of neocolonial values, but the narrator of the *Nervous Conditions* frames this internal conflict using language that makes it accessible to the novel's readers although it is a mystery to Tambu herself. Shaw's perception is that the narrator's tone in *Nervous Conditions* reflects Dangarembga's own disillusionment with Western ideologies that promise liberation from poverty, colonial domination, and sexism.

Shaw points out that Dangarembga, during her time at university in Zimbabwe, witnessed firsthand that national liberation did not lead to liberation for women, and Zimbabwe's socialism did not create political unity, stop political corruption, or prevent the military from brutalizing its own citizens (Shaw 21). This disillusionment is not Ngugi's unilateral rejection of the West, but the careful untangling and self-inventory that appears in the final paragraph when Tambu-as-narrator concludes by saying, "Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bring me to this time when I can set down this story. It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. It was a process whose events stretched over many years and would fill another volume" (208). This is, I believe, a hallmark of a new, postmodern kind of *Bildung*, that sees the

93

past self's development as conditional and unfinished because it is always inextricably linked to a subjectivity that is constantly authoring and re-authoring itself. While *Nervous Conditions* can be read as an allegory of Zimbabwe's independence from white minority rule, and its sequel *The Book of Not* deals specifically with a period of time straddling Zimbabwe's independence, both novels are first and foremost part of the story of the protagonist's difficult development despite her marginalization due to her poverty, her race, and her gender.

Almost two decades separate the publication of *Nervous Conditions* from its sequel, *The Book of Not*, and while it does not conclude Tambu's story, it does extend the character's development from childhood to adolescence. In her review of the novel in *The Guardian*, Helon Habila said of the novel that, "[the] theme of escape runs throughout the novel: escape from her village, escape from her family, escape from her Africanness" (Habila). Despite Tambu's avoidance of the problems of her family, *The Book of Not* illustrates how she has internalized the behaviors and conflicts from her childhood. Her childhood subjection is gendered, as Tambu learns from older feminine models what it is to be a woman and from the male members of her family, particularly her uncle, how to relate to the institutions that shape public life in her nation. Tambu's complicated relationship with her uncle during her childhood profoundly impacts her reception of racial conflict on the cusp of independence in Rhodesia during her adolescence, and her desire to find a refuge from the mingling of familial resentment and political violence back home drives her adolescent development. In the novel, the teenage Tambu moves between three spaces: her village and the mission where her uncle is headmaster, the convent-school of the Sacred Heart, and post-independence Harare, where she lives in a hostel and works at an advertising firm. Each situation exerts different pressures on Tambu, and her struggles at each

stage and place represent her efforts to either find identity in acknowledgement or resist subjection.

Like *Nervous Conditions*, *The Book of Not* begins with a singularly striking image touching upon the mortality of one of Tambu's siblings: after her sister steps on a landmine, the explosion flings the girl's severed leg into a tree, and unable to deal with the horror of her sister's wounds in their entirety, Tambu fixates on the limb. The image is metonymic; the context of her sister's disfigurement is a *morari*, a nighttime political meeting, during which a member of the Zimbabwe rebel group that Tambu's sister belongs to beats her uncle, Babamukuru. The violence within their family, fueled by Tambu's mother, Mai's, resentment of Babamukuru's wealth, education, and status, becomes political violence as the rebels attack *mutengesi*, traitors that the rebels believe are collaborating with the white Rhodesians, and this fracturing of familial bonds manifests in the literal dismemberment of a family member. The beginning of the novel positions Tambu on the frontline of this civil conflict, as her mother implies that if she shows fear of the rebels, that she may be branded a traitor as well (10-11). Ironically, after her sister is injured, the members of the village look to the beaten Babamukuru for leadership, and a cousin suggests that they send Tambu with her sister, Netsai, because Rhodesian army officers will be more likely to allow them to pass if Tambu speaks to them with an English accent (18). As in the first novel, the narrator of *The Book of Not* uses the first person future anterior to reflect on her own development, noting that the very qualities that make subjects like Babamukuru and Tambu useful to those seeking independence for Zimbabwe also make them suspect in the eyes of the rebels. At one point, Tambu-as-future-anterior-narrator wonders how she can conceive (with the double meaning implicit in the verb) her own mother, and teach Mai what she needs to know for the future, while at the same time Tambu begs God

95

not to make her like her mother (11). The scene of her sister's injury encapsulates Tambu's contradictory desires: a compulsion to save her family combined with an abject revulsion of their violence and resentment.

The bulk of the novel is set in the College of the Sacred Heart convent school where *Nervous Conditions* ends. The initial impression that the narrator gives readers of the convent as Tambu returns after the holidays is telling: "Empty rooms, empty desks, empty books, empty air between us… and the mountain with the cross on top, down which plantations, dark, of wattle and pine crept like dispirited armies" (20). Tambu compares the convent's gates to the gates of heaven and finds comfort and structure in the formal rankings for her grade (26). For Tambu, the school is a refuge removed from the hatred and grief of the outside world, providing a shelter for the children but haunted by the creeping specter of the civil war. Periodically, stories of the families of white settler children being slaughtered by rebels run like shocks through the students, at one point inspiring Tambu to knit caps for Rhodesian soldiers in penance, yet the members of the crowded "African dormitory" that Tambu is a part of also suffers losses due to both rebel militants and the Rhodesian army. The conflict shapes the way the girls of the convent, particularly the inhabitants of the African dormitory, relate to each other, and even though Tambu and her uncle resist the idea with all their might, and the head of the convent Sister Emmanuel disavows it, politics dictates how the faculty treats the students as well. Following the example set by her uncle, Tambu resists identification with the Zimbabwe rebels, and through academic achievement, seeks acknowledgement from the school as the chief institution she associates with the Rhodesian nation, as well as from her white peers, in order to find an identity distinct from the other "African" students. She makes sense of these efforts in terms of her development of *unhu,* "personhood" in Shona, and her inability to account for the

96

exclusion of the African dormitory, present but ignored except for the occasional censure designed to make these unwanted students withdraw from the school, as well as her disappointment in the failure of *unhu* as a philosophy, locks Tambu into a cycle of self-recrimination.

Even without the intrusion of the future anterior perspective, the adolescent Tambu expresses a greater awareness of her racial identity as a liability at the school than her childhood self does, but the realization comes to her tentatively. She exults in her time in the library reading, yet her words, describing her literary escapism, contain a hint of discontent at being the unwilling subject of many stories: "Away, away you whisked in that place, into the pictures of other people's imaginations, the pages of other people's histories" (49). Much later, she begins to understand how she and other Africans, as individual subjects, are part of an indiscriminate mass of black faces to the white Rhodesian settlers, especially in their newspapers, until they gain a name by defying Rhodesian authorities: "A person was a nanny, a cook, a boy gardener, boy messenger, boy driver, a member of the African dormitory until this nanny, cook or boy became a terrorist. Then the person achieved a name… That was how it was for people whose husband, son, father, aunt, or sister, made the transition from sustainer of life to one who trampled it out. But also, in this lack of identity, one could hide" (110-111). Further, Tambu recognizes that the faculty of the convent reproduces this racial blindness, reflecting that, "Sister Emmanuel was one of those people who even in praise erased you" (111). This mature realization inspires Tambu to seek the trophy, in a bid for some kind of positive recognition, for the best O-Level results for her year. Her determined scholarship culminates in a white classmate, Tracey, being awarded the trophy despite having inferior marks, for being more "well-rounded" due to her involvement in extracurricular sports that Tambu and the other black students are excluded from (155).

The game is obviously and thoroughly rigged, and yet Tambu decides to study sciences

for her A-Level exams, but is forbidden from attending the classes at a nearby campus due to the

Rhodesian government's racist policies. She is reduced to studying the notes of an indifferent

white classmate, and her A-Level exam marks suffer as a result. What becomes apparent to her

fellow students, if not to Tambu and her patron uncle Babamukuru, is that the convent's faculty

isn't focused on development the abilities of their black students or in preparing them to become

leaders in the future. Instead, they are obsessed with finding and correcting the African students

for their faults.

As this chapter mentioned previously, the members of the African dormitory are most

often criticized on the basis of their hygiene and sleeping habits. Tambu worries about touching

white students while she stands in line at assembly (49-50), the matron charged with waking

students in the morning, Miss Plato, considers it her personal responsibility to teach the girls of

the African dormitory to overcome their "natural" tardiness and disorganization (50-56),[52] and

Sister Emmanuel publically humiliates the African dormitory for disposing of their menstrual

pads in the improper way while discretely disciplining white students in private for smoking

marijuana in the dormitories. One of the ways that Tambu tries to distinguish herself from the

other members of the African dormitory is by buying her own "tuck," extra foodstuffs purchased

with money that Babamukuru gives her (36). She uses her higher social class to contrast herself

with poorer students, like her academic rival, Ntombi. During her time at the convent, Ntombi

acts as Tambu's chief foil; while other characters, like the youngest member of the dormitory,

---

[52] Tambu notes, but does not seem to acknowledge, that the reason the students in the African
dormitory are tardy and disorganized is because twice as many students are packed into the
African dormitory and share the same bathroom as in other rooms. She also implies, but doesn't
admit, that Miss Plato comes to their dormitory first to harass them for being slow while the
other dormitories are able to get ready in the morning free from molestation.

Irene, sometimes highlight how unwilling Tambu herself is to speak out against injustice (70-71), Ntombi goes so far as to call Tambu a traitor to her people when Tambu volunteers to knit for the Rhodesian cause (136-137). While Tambu's education prompts her to invest more into courting the good opinion of the Rhodesian settlers, Ntombi questions Tambu's efforts to please them. The rational basis for Tambu's pursuit of acknowledgement is her concept of *unhu*, or personhood.

Central to the study of *The Book of Not* as a *Bildungsroman* is the concept of *unhu* in the novel. The first scene where Tambu dwells on personhood is one in that a wealthy and popular white student, Bougainvillea, offers her some Nesquik after forcing some on Ntombi in a patronizing way. Tambu weighs her options, trying to decide what response possesses the most dignity:

> Bougainvillea wanted me now to take the powder; I would be doing her a favour, but why did she want me to have it and so was she to be trusted? Then again, there were reasons to obey such directives, for upon a taste, I would work hard to ensure more portions in any way I could, thus preparing for my success in the future. On the other hand, by taking in what was offered that I could not provide for myself, I might become seriously outraged, or could fall into the habit of believing I deserved as much as they had, without having earned it (44)

Tambu is frozen in consideration, recalling her mother's resentment of Babamukuru, and the white students mock her indecision and change the subject. This moment sets the pattern for Tambu's future difficulties. Tambu's understanding of *unhu*, translated as personhood and associated with dignity, is connected to a traditional Shona greeting, *Tiripo, kana makadini wo!*

"I am well if you are all right too!" According to Tambu, the greeting stems from the basic belief that, "Everything was reciprocal and so were we; we all knew it, so said it every day in our greetings. This meant that what people saw you as being was a large part of what you were!"[53] (64). She believes she should treat Bougainvillea as she would like her mother to treat Babamukuru, as family, and disregards what she knows of Bougainvillea's cruel attitude toward Ntombi when she is in the same position. Later, after the headmistress gives Tambu a poor report and implies that she might be better off attending another school, and Babamukuru scolds her and instructs to write Sister Emmanuel a letter of apology, Tambu feels a moment of shock when she hears some white children at a nearby school have been killed by rebels and whispers, "I'm glad I'm not them." She suspects that she is responding to racial tensions by adopting a hateful and violent ideology, and decides that Babamukuru was right in making her apologize. By allowing the African dormitory to suffer, Tambu decides, the convent is providing comfort to the children of threatened white settlers and breaking the cycle of violence (100-102). Finally, speaking in the future anterior, Tambu-as-narrator concludes that as an adolescent, she often found comfort in allowing someone else, Ntombi or Nyasha, be angry for her to avoid outrage herself because her notion of *unhu* did not allow anger toward others.[54] When the only valid

---

[53] I read this element of reciprocity as central to *unhu* as being almost akin to the Nigerian *mbari* ritual and Kant's law of hospitality, both discussed in the last chapter. *Unhu* isn't so much an acknowledgement of alterity as a denial of alterity, the refusal to admit otherness; the "Golden Rule" or ethic of reciprocity found in many cultures. Tambu, in pursuit of *unhu*, insists on seeing others as she sees herself and of thinking others see her as the same despite all evidence to the contrary.

[54] A conversation with Nyasha in that Tambu reflects on how Nyasha feels outrage so she doesn't have to contains a humorous reference to Ngugi Thiong'o: "She was reading a book she had not bothered to share with me, that rather than being revolutionary seemed to be about agriculture for it was called *A Grain of Wheat,* written as far as I could see, by someone like poor Bongo in the Congo, a starving Kenyan author" (117).

response to others is anger, Tambu-as-narrator relates, *unhu* becomes dysfunctional: "There was a reason for this dysfunctionality, obscure to me then, that was the key to the philosophy itself. In a phrase, this was the principle of reciprocity. *Unhu* did not function, unless the other person was practicing *unhu* also. Without reciprocation, *unhu* could not be *unhu*. The practice of it assumed that *unhu* was given" (119).

Tambu-as-narrator further applies this dysfunction not only to her younger self, but to her ancestors as well. Racism, in addition to being incompatible with an ethic of reciprocity, is often incomprehensible to those who practice an ethical system that does not acknowledge alterity. Due to this philosophical system, Tambu is unable to critique the flawed system that limits her (164). Tambu's final effort to build *unhu* is her work knitting caps for Rhodesian soldiers, but the mounting death toll and persistent discrimination eventually sap her will to engage in such work, and she abandons it (166).

Tambu, throughout her time at the convent, doggedly resists acknowledging the racism of her peers and of the convent, and her desire for their acknowledgement is complicated by her conception of *unhu* as a philosophy of character-building, as well as her materialism and competitiveness.[55] The text implies that the more she is discriminated against unjustly, the more Tambu falls into a cycle of blaming herself for the injustices perpetrated upon her, and Babamukuru's rejection of her once she receives middling marks on her A-Level exams causes Tambu to fault herself for her limited options and prompts her to move after graduation to post-

[55] In a conversation with Nyasha, Tambu worries that Nyasha's sympathy for girls subject to genital mutilation gives her more *unhu* that Tambu, as if *unhu* is a competition that she can win (119), and later, after observing the uplifting effect music on the radio has on the girls in her dormitory, Tambu wonders whether having *unhu* is what earned people their possessions, or whether possessing material goods is what gives a person *unhu* (145).

independence Harrare (191). Like the convent before, Tambu's arrival in Harrare reflects her

desire to find a more inclusive space, free of the violence and discrimination she encountered in

the convent: "You craved relief when it was like that; a way out of the world Europeans wove in

a pattern that was so exhausting, escape to a destination far from here, where people were

benevolent and gracious, and by consensus everyone, women and teenagers too, were included"

(175).

Even after political independence however, and the abolishment of racist laws, there is de

facto segregation and widespread discrimination in the workplace (203). Tambu's landlord and

fellow hostel roommates do not acknowledge her as an individual, often calling her by the wrong

name (206-211), and her former classmate Tracey works as a vice president at an advertising

firm where she functions as a lowly copy writer. Tambu resents a younger woman of color who

exhibits the *unhu*/character and idealism that she once felt (212) and distrusts her fellow copy

writer Belinda's motives when the woman encourages her to write her own advertising blurbs

(218). Instead, Tambu helps a senior advertiser named Dick work on his advertisements, ads that

she believes are superior to her own work because Dick has greater access to European literature

as opposed to her own Shona tradition, and simultaneously, she accepts advertisement copy that

touts the "mysterious" ruins of Zimbabwe to tourists, denying her country's history and heritage

(218). When Tambu believes that Dick is finally going to acknowledge her hard work in

rewriting one of his advertising campaigns, he tells her that senior management decided that the

client would not accept advertising copy written by an African and accepts an award for the

campaign's success, prompting Tambu to resign (242).

The concluding Harrare chapters of *The Book of Not* indicate that political independence

has not resolved Zimbabwe's troubled race relations, and Tambu's own experience illustrates

102

that she cannot untangle personal betrayals, such as Tracey and Dick's, from institutionalized racism that shields these individuals from personal responsibility. Late in the novel, Tambu's mother calls and insists on either Tambu visiting home or coming herself to visit Tambu in Harrare with Tambu's sister. Even though at the end of the novel, Tambu has left her job, and her landlord has asked her to leave the hostel where she lives, she hesitates returning to her family. She considers a series of equally disappointing futures as a new Zimbabwean, and the future anterior narrator notes that she has not considered *unhu* in her deliberations since she left the convent, only her own misfortunes (246).

Implicit in the ending of the novel is that *unhu*, a deliberate project of self-cultivation based on reciprocal acknowledgement in a world where others refuse to see the subject or accept one as a class or type of aggregate, is limited. However, this project of self-creation still promises a sense of context and of mission that the subject can use to make meaning of his or her life. The novel leaves Tambu, who is almost old enough to be an adult now, as part of both the new Zimbabwe and as an individual subject with a distinct form of understanding. Moving into the future, she must come to a deeper understanding of how she came to this crossroads and find her own path.

Dangarembga's focus on women moves the treatment of African *Bildungsroman* from a treatment of the subject that approximates the allegorical to one that embraces identification as intersectional, revisionary, and recursive. Once, in an interview, when the interviewer commented that Dangarembga didn't "entirely reject…oppressive customs, nor…fully embrace modernization" and asked her if Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* was "headed in the right direction," Dangarembga replied, "People make individual choices. I think mapping the ground

helps in making the choices. Such maps, written in an engaging way, are part of what I perceive

my responsibility as a novelist to be" (*Nervous* 211).[56]

Earlier in the interview, she argues that while individuals can be held responsible for

reacting to a situation in a certain way, the situation that exerted the pressure on them should also

be addressed as well (*ibid* 210). This exploration of self-formation as a complex, tentative, and

always incomplete process, and of the interrelated ideologies that shape the self also animates the

Bildung of Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus*.

The gap between Dangarembga and Adichie encapsulates a shift in the *Bildungsroman*

from acknowledging that self-formation is not a natural or inevitable process but a contentious,

incomplete, and never-ending project. A subject must always struggle against others agents

backed by traditional and/or institutional apparatuses with a strong interest in categorizing and

defining the subject, and that this struggle permits no rest.

The main character of *Purple Hibiscus* is a young Nigerian woman named Kambili who

is coming of age in a household where she, her mother, and her brother, are almost entirely

defined in relation to their father, a wealthy businessman and newspaper owner, Eugene Achike.

Eugene's power over them is rooted in a patriarchal family tradition, his role as a community

leader through his status as an owner of a newspaper, his severe Catholic faith, and his high

standards for his children's performance at school. He draws on his authority to structure their

daily schedule down to the minute, to isolate the family from what he considers harmful

influences, like Kambili's animist grandfather and her liberal professor aunt, and finally, to

---

[56] There seems to be an element of implicit didacticism, to a greater or lesser extent, in the *Bildungsroman*. The narrator's holding forth of the details of his or her life as a model of development suggests that the narrative mode prioritizes instruction before entertainment.

punish Kambili's body by, among other things, enacting a perverse reversal of Christ's washing

of the feet of his disciples by dipping her feet in scalding hot water to keep Kambili from

"walking in sin." One of the alternatives to suffering this constant abuse is the path that

Kambili's mother Beatrice ultimately takes. After losing several children to miscarriages after

Eugene beats her and watching her grown children's daily abuse, Beatrice eventually poisons

Eugene. Her son, Jaja, takes the blame, but the years of abuse and the murder of her husband

take their toll on Beatrice, and she lapses into dementia. The strength of Adichie's novel, as a

Bildungsroman, is that Kambili demonstrates the strength to overcome the abuse and tragedy and

exhibits a mature, compassionate voice able to reflect on the horrible things her father did to her

and the terrible state her family is in when the novels ends while still retaining hope for the

future.

In "Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the Voice of the Third Generation,"

Heather Hewett describes a number of critics who see *Purple Hibiscus* as a coming-of-age story

focused specifically on Kambili's attempts to recover from the trauma of physical abuse meted

out by her domineering father and find her own voice. More significantly for this study, Hewett

describes how Adichie responds to and revises the literary landscape established by writers like

Chinua Achebe. To illustrate the approach of third generation Nigeria writers in general, Hewett

quotes Helon Habila as saying, referring to Achebe, "I try to avoid that… I don't know what to

call it- that exotic stuff. I want to write about the reality that is happening now. The use of myth

and legend and history was very traditional. Times have changed" (Hewett 77). The strategy of

early African writers, Habila seems to imply, was asserting the history and culture of Africa in

response to its negation by the West; recent African authors are aiming for a more personal voice

in an established post-colonial literary canon. Feminist African writers in English, especially,

must contend not just with the anxiety of influence from the Western literary canon, but also from earlier male African writers. The story of Kambili contending with her larger-than-life, bullying but at times still beloved father parallels the emergence of these woman writers from the shadow of their literary, almost uniformly male, forbearers.

Hewett points out that Adichie refers to *Things Fall Apart* twice in *Purple Hibiscus* in order to alert her readers that she will be rewriting and remapping the earlier novel. She demonstrates that Kambili's father, Eugene, shares many qualities in common with Achebe's Okonkwo: they both abuse their spouses, they are both influential in their communities, they despise their fathers, and their insistence on familial authority stems from their relative powerlessness to resist sweeping political and social change. While Okonkwo's second wife, Ekwefi (his first wife isn't even named in the novel), tells the priestess Chielo that she "cannot yet find a mouth with which to tell the story" (48), Adichie tells the story of an abusive husband from the perspective of his family, the victims of his abuse (Hewett 79-80). Returning to Kambili's conflicted affection and fear of her father, Eugene, a strict Catholic, frames his abuse as being motivated by his role as spiritual caretaker of his wife and children; while pouring boiling water on Kambili's feet, Eugene refers to the priests at his missionary school doing the same thing to him. Kambili withstands it, not just because she fears her father might do worse, but because she believes him when he says that she must suffer oppression like he did to become empowered like he did. Just as Dangarembga complicates Ngugi's Marxist counter-discourse by adding the consideration of gender, Adichie does the same with Achebe, demonstrating how sexism inflects the interconnection between religious authority and patriarchal power while pointing out that the mechanisms of power are emotionally complex and often interiorized by the victims. Both Dangarembga and Adichie utilize the first person to challenge the grand historical

106

narratives Ngugi and Achebe establish as counter-discourses to imperialism through their third person omniscient perspective.

What were studies of the formation of African subject under the stresses of modernity in the earlier novels becomes self-authorship in the later novels; what was purely political in the earlier novels becomes mixed with the intimately personal. This movement from speaking with the collective voice of the oppressed to speaking with a singular voice, the oppressed among (and sometimes by) the oppressed, marks a fundamental shift in the *Bildungsroman* of the Anglophone periphery. Hewett calls this process of self-authorship, the formation of the postmodern *Bildungsheld*, what bell hooks calls a "coming to voice" (*Talking Back* 12) and a struggle to be heard. She notes that Gayatri Spivak argues that the subaltern in a text is not allowed to speak, but I would argue that within Anglophone literature as a whole, the real struggle is frequently to distinguish one's self as coherent and distinct from the categorically oppressed, that aggregate mass defined in opposition to and sometimes by dominant ideological apparatuses. In the interest of solidarity, even the subjects identifying with an oppressed group may control the bodies and voices of the subaltern among them or disrupt the doubly subaltern's efforts at empowerment or self-expression, just as in *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene's fear and hatred of the political forces arraigned against him and his newspaper appear to fuel his desire to impose his will on his family, who are transfixed between identification with him and their yearning to resist his oppression and abuse. Hewett indicates that in *Purple Hibiscus,* Eugene often renders his daughter Kambili speechless in his presence as she is caught between the desire to please him and the fear of punishment, but she further complicates Kambili's position by discussing Carole Boyce Davies's assessment that the problem of the subaltern isn't simply voicelessness, but that her oppressors either hear her selectively or insist on mishearing her. In

Adichie's novel, there are multiple incidents when Kambili's schoolmates and her cousin Amaka take her silence or fragmented attempts at speech as simple shyness, rudeness, or arrogance, exacerbating her isolation from others (Hewett 85). Until very late in the novel, Kambili, her brother Jaja, and their mother find it nearly impossible to speak of their abuse even to each other, but instead communicate with glances and body language. It is only when Kambili and Jaja spend time in their Aunty Ifeoma's house with her family, a family where debate, disagreement, and unstructured activity are all encouraged, that they begin to imagine an environment where they can find their voice.

Hewett uses Peter Elbow's term "resonant voice" to describe a voice that authentically reflects the inner condition of the subject. She notes that Elbow further suggests that before the individual can speak with this resonant voice, he or she must first dismantle the "acceptable self" that is constructed to gain the approval of others (Hewett 87). This "acceptable self" may be a pose that conceals the nonidentical elements of the self, and there are two prescriptions laid out in modern literature to dismantle this assimilated self and assert an authentic, empowered objectivity. The first step is the creation of a counter-discourse, an assertion of the humanity of a people that have been negated by an oppressive power and the discovery or creation of an inclusive community willing to incorporate subjectivities that are considered non-identical elsewhere. The second step involves a subject finding his or her voice within this new framework. One example is Stuart-Young, who had to leave London and come to Onitsha to reinvent himself, the *Bildungsheld* or these novels by Dangarembga and Adichie search for a safe environment to find their voices.

In concluding her essay, Heather Hewett positions Adichie's novel in a black woman's literary tradition because it "enables us to think about it comparatively, across transnational

traditions and discursive contexts, and it enables us to see the intricacy of its intertextual connections" (87). In addition, the appeal of placing Adichie's work within feminist studies, Hewett also writes, it "enables the woman writer to define herself through the power of language. Claiming a voice is an internal act that results from tapping into the authority derived from an individual's lived experience. It does not depend upon external sources of power, whether institutional, cultural, or discursive; to the contrary, it often challenges them" (88). She seems to be arguing that the subject must, as part of the subject's movement toward developing a resonant voice, break down the externally imposed self into its constituent elements and reassemble them to assist the subject in resisting future impositions of power. A similar design motivates me to place the works of African authors within the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*. My intention is not to subsume African literature to a Western tradition, but to point out the tremendous utility of the genre as a vehicle for the assertion of subaltern voices in the face of oppression and in the aftermath of trauma, a vehicle that is not limited to a single gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or culture, but that remains adaptable.

While the challenges for African writers are considerable, including the legacies of racism, neocolonialism, and political oppression, they also have the tremendous resource of a rich oral tradition of storytelling to draw from. The obstacles *Bildung* writers face to dismantling imposed identities and discovering the *Bildungsheld*'s voice as a tool of resistance and creation are considerable and specific to the historical conditions of each regional literature. We will consider the problems of self-development in African-American *Bildung* literature in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MODERN AFRICAN-AMERICAN *BILDUNGSROMAN*

In Chapter Three, I related how Heather Hewett described Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* as a rewriting of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, writing that Adichie provided those characters silenced in Achebe's text, the mothers and children, with a safe space where they could assert their own subjectivity through a "coming to voice" (*Talking Back* 12). That chapter dealt with Africa as a relatively close hemispheric neighbor to the British center, a colonized "Other" space that served for many years (and may still serve) as a counterpart to the metropolitan West, and the bodies of its peoples as receptacles for those traits deemed nonidentical to the favored, idealized Western European subject. The struggle illustrated by the African *Bildungsheld* was, for many years, an attempt to find agency and empowerment despite the denigration by colonizing cultures of indigenous culture, language, and religion. This attempt at first centered on the recovery of a pre-colonial past and a collective striving toward a politically independent future, but later post-colonial texts pointed toward the persistence of domestic oppression in Anglophone Africa even after political independence from Great Britain, and more recent African *Bildungsromane* have utilized feminist critique to explore and sap energy from patriarchal power structures entrenched in both Westernized and indigenous African institutions. One might say the fundamental work of the African *Bildungsroman* is an effort to create a psychic space apart from the violence of power where one can dismantle the "acceptable

self" and create a durable subject position. This durable self allows one to reevaluate and recover from trauma in order to find a resonant voice to address the imposition of power in the future.

The situation of the African-American *Bildungsheld* is fundamentally different, in that the protagonist of these texts is in constant, often intimate contact with those who oppress and silence him or her. The key characteristic of these *Bildungsromane* is the immanent marginality of their subjects due to their constant occupation of the same space as their oppressors. This marginality transforms from a state, in the words of bell hooks, "imposed by oppressive structures" to one that the *Bildungsheld* "chooses as site of resistance, as location of racial openness and possibility" (*Yearning* 22).

The most recent incarnation of the African-American *Bildungsroman* involves a coming-to-terms with the threat of the postmodernist deconstruction of identity. This new de-centering, non-essentialist subject emerges after a long period when the *Bildungsroman*'s modern model of oppositional subjectivity has offered marginalized groups a means of vocal empowerment, a stage to defend and celebrate denigrated traits associated with essentialist blackness against the privileged traits interwoven with essentialist whiteness. Maryemma Graham identifies an "autobiographical impulse" in the African-American novel that manifests as "the continuous need to explain and 'inscribe the self' in a world that has historically denied the existence of that self that gives both focus and intensity to the act of writing a story about black life" (Graham 5). The modern *Bildungsroman* of African-American writers, however, is grounded in a position that is oppositional to the essentialist, universalizing subjectivity of Western individualism, and the postmodern turn in Western culture has undermined both Western individualism and the oppositional positioning of marginal groups. In her essay "Postmodern Blackness," bell hooks described the dilemma of subjectivity as a state of yearning, of a shared sense of "deep

111

alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of a sense of grounding" that crosses "boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexual practice" (*Yearning* 27).

The yearning for a cohesive and empowered identity, one that provides agency but includes respect for difference, seems predicated upon the creation of a composite and contingent sense of identity, a hyphenated, hybrid, and often transgressive subjectivity, that will be discussed in more detail in the last chapter of this work.

The retooling of the *Bildung* as an oppositional force to master narratives of gendered power and submission in African-American literature predates its appearance in other English literatures and is rooted in the slave narratives of the mid-nineteenth century. Critics of the African novel like Apollo Amoko and of African-American literature such as Claudine Raynaud and Geta LeSeur have pointed out that the distinction between autobiography and *Bildungsroman* often blur, and in the case of a number of African-American texts, an author's slave narrative precedes a *Bildungsroman* or is replaced by a *Bildungsroman*, that serves as thinly disguised fictive autobiography. Geta LeSeur identifies William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States*, published in 1853, as a *Bildungsroman* that establishes the literary trope of the tragic mullata. The novel features the fictional daughters of Thomas Jefferson who, while passing for white, legally remain slaves and are sold to other owners after his death. Although elsewhere Brown laments the impossibility of representing slavery, the details of slavery's evils and abuses in *Clotel* paralleled Brown's repeated rewriting and revising of his own slave narrative, that first saw publication in 1847, but that he rereleased with the publication of *Clothel* after he moved to Great Britain in 1849 to provide greater educational opportunities for his daughters (Brown vii-ix). Brown's *Clotel*

emerges as the first African-American novel and the first African-American *Bildungsroman* although it was not published in the United States.

In addition to *Clotel*, LeSeur identifies both Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself* and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* as *Bildungsromane.* In the introduction to the Trent edition of *Our Nig*, RJ Ellis points out how Wilson's novel establishes two themes that early African-American authors often feature, that of the problem of names and 'naming' in slave narratives[57] and of finding a "workable genre" that seems to be a combination of "novel, autobiography, documentary, [and] popular fiction" (Wilson viii). As a genre, the *Bildungsroman* often features a preoccupation with naming and a shifting mix of structural ingredients that borrow from the picaresque,[58] confessional writing, and autobiography; the African-American *Bildungsroman* seems no different, simply more self-aware in that even its earliest authors are more inclined to reflect on their literary antecedents. In a collection of scholarly essays, *In Search of Hannah Crafts,* Catherine Keyser argues that Hannah Crafts, in

---

[57] The problem of naming in African American slave narratives arises, of course, due to the fact that most slaves were only given a first name. William Wells Brown himself took his last name from a Quaker couple in Ohio that gave him food, shelter, and clothes while he was a fugitive. Any kind of immigrant subject moving from one region to another, however, experiences a similar struggle for social identification, and these immigrants often adopt a name change to signify their rebirth into a new community. The people of Onitsha renamed J.M. Stuart-Young when he settled there after leaving England behind, and RJ Ellis points out in the introduction to *Our Nig* that Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* shares this preoccupation with names and naming. The *Bildungsroman* often features characters whose names shift depending on the society they keep. Charles Dickens's titular protagonist in *David Copperfield* is nicknamed, "Daisy" by his school friend Steerforth, "Trotwood" by his adoptive aunt Betsey, and "Doady" by his childish first wife Dora. Junot Diaz's protagonist in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* receives a nickname from his sister's boyfriend and the novel's narrator, Yunior, that marks him as marginal even in the Dominican immigrant community of New Jersey, a kind of outsider in a community of outsiders.

[58] *Tom Jones, Huckleberry Finn,* and Kipling's *Kim* all seem to straddle both the *Bildungsroman* and picaresque genres.

her novel *The Bondswoman's Narrative*, a *Bildungsroman* by a black female author that may predate the publication of *Our Nig*, provides "a canny critical reading of *Jane Eyre* that anticipates the postcolonial and racial focus central to contemporary critical understanding of that novel." Keyser writes that the recovered novel counters those critics who stress the female voices in *Jane Eyre* that are repressed by the white imperialist narrator and author and claim that "the autobiography of self-formation is centrally a Western imperialistic construction" (Keyser 87-8). In this novel, Keyser suggests, Crafts utilizes the narrative structure of *Jane Eyre*, "childhood to self-formation in crisis to marriage," to represent the self-constitution of a "native female" subject. In "Freeing the Voice, Creating the Self," Christopher Mulvey calls early African-American fiction a "literature of fusion" and explores further how Wilson, Brown, and Crafts (as well as Frederick Douglass, Martin R. Delany, and Frank J. Webb) employ both black vernacular and the literary speech of Dickens and the Brontës in their work (Mulvey 27).

The unique structure that emerges from slave narratives and becomes a persistent part of future African-American *Bildungsroman* is one, as described by Mulvey, of realization, resistance, flight, survival, and deliverance (Mulvey 18). This structure recurs in the novels discussed in this chapter, and its appearance marks these texts as counter-modern as well as modern.[59] Writing about this awareness of the African-American subject as being divided by the constant awareness of its own objectification dates from the publication of W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folks* in 1903: "One ever feels his twoness,- an American, a Negro, two

---

[59] This structure stands in direct contrast to modern formalist narrative morphology and Romantic assessments of narrative structure such as the "hero's journey" promoted by American scholars such as Joseph Campbell, that tend to be broken down into a reluctant departure from the home, mentoring at the hands of a patriarchal figure, initiation into a broader society, trials and tribulations that test the subject's resolve, and the return to the home. This structure appears in many *Bildungsromane*, but the African American novel, beginning with slave narratives, self-consciously follows this structure while simultaneously interrogating it.

souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois 1). Du Bois writes about the constant desire to merge this divided self into a coherent whole, and the insurmountable tension between divided selves animates novels of African-American subjectivity.

In the essay "Reconstructing the Race," M. Giulia Fabi describes the African-American texts arising from the post-Bellum period as deliberately multi-voiced, strategic in the use of signifying or coded communication, and systematic in modeling metanarrative interrogation of traditional methods of reading and receiving texts (Fabi 39). Just as the authors of slave narratives were aware that they were writing primarily for a white audience, and as a result, their narrators self-consciously address how white readers might receive their stories, the authors of the post-Bellum period were writing both to uplift the community of black readers of their work. They did this to prompt white readers into interrogating scientific racism's commonplace assumptions about the inferiority of African Americans and popular depictions of the pre-war Southern plantation as an idyllic, pastoral historical artifact ruined by emancipation.[60] Furthermore, Fabi points out how another *Bildungsroman,* Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted,* contradicts plantation nostalgia by providing a realistic depiction of slavery and reconstruction that suggests that through a collective effort, the South can be a place of liberty for all (Fabi 41-2). From the inception of the tradition, the African-American novel of a character's personal development has always also been at least implicitly political, and often it is explicitly so.

---

[60] Fabi notes how African-American novels might blend speculative fiction with the *Bildungsroman* in order to provide a counter-example to eugenics-inspired utopias full of racially pure supermen by emphasizing, for example in Sutton E. Grigg's *Imperium in Imperio*, how personal and social evolution could bring about an ideal post-racist future society.

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, two trends, at times thought of as in contention, began to solidify in the African-American *Bildungsroman*. One is the socially realistic "protest" novel, such as Richard Wright's *Native Son,* that attempts to represent African-American personal and social development as counter-modern and authentically distinct from mainstream American and European modes of subjectivity. These narratives often end in the destruction or exile of the *Bildungsheld*. The other trend is the impressionistic, "high modernist" novel, such as the novels of Zora Neale Hurston or Langston Hughes's *Not Without Laughter*, that emphasizes a return to or rediscovery of folk tradition. The development of these trends is commonly associated with Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, respectively, but James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* predates Ellison's *Invisible Man* by forty years and shares many similarities with Ellison's novel although the tone and treatment of the *Bildungsheld* in each work is fundamentally different. Johnson's protagonist, in addition to being able to assimilate culturally into white society, is able to pass physically for white. Like Ellison's protagonist, Johnson's character is nameless and migrates from the rural South to the North, but unlike Ellison's narrator, who at first appears deluded into cultural assimilation through the rhetoric of racial uplift, Johnson's character is a parody of modern assimilation.[61] Robert Stepto, in *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, called Johnson's narrator a "negative example" of blackness (104). He describes a character who admires the authority of

---

[61] Heather Russell Andrade, in "Revising Critical Judgments of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*," argues effectively that this is the first novel by an African American that "deliberately masks its genre" further writing that "the confessional frame is a guise, self-consciously employed by Johnson to authenticate the main character's story, strategically, to give the text the *appearance* of an autobiography. From the onset, the narrative co-mingles genres" (Andrade 257). Historically, many critics have missed Johnson's ironic tone and failed to read the novel as satire. When it was originally published, anonymously, the novel was reviewed unfavorably; it only became influential when Johnson acknowledged his authorship when it was republished during the Harlem Renaissance.

white society and denigrates lower-class black culture, but at the same time offers subversive observations about white characters and, through his performance of black ragtime music, celebrates the excellence of black culture (Fabi 47). Ultimately, the Ex-Coloured Man's rejection of black life and culture, like that of those tragic mulattos who choose to pass for white, culminates in his unhappy alienation from both racially-defined societies, as he enjoys the cold comfort of passing for white while regretting his lack of fulfillment as a black artist who might be a credit to the African-American community in the South.

Early African-American works like Johnson's, that attempt to answer the negation of the African-American self, its culture, and its history with a satirical treatment of cultural assimilation and its implicit assertion of an authentic and independent black identity, all lay the groundwork for the *Bildungsromane* that emerge during the Harlem Renaissance. Just as Amos Tutuola and Chinua Achebe would in the late 50s, African-American *Bildung* between and during the two World Wars asserted the vibrant intellectual life of black characters in opposition to popular images focusing on their bodies. In an essay on the Negro Renaissance, George Hutchinson briefly lays out the sudden expansion in black literature as a result of the Great Migration to the North, new intellectual trends that emphasized cultural pluralism and anti-racism,[62] the growth of a black middle class and an increase in literacy after Reconstruction, as well as changes in the American publishing industry after World War I, the most important of that is the rise of a black literature written by black artists rather than about them, including

---

[62]Attempts by Marxists and the New Left to enlist (but not necessarily address the specific concerns of) African Americans interested in achieving social change appear in many of these novels. In his autobiographical novel *Black Boy,* Richard Wright records his contentious experiences with the Communist Party during a May Day march in 1936, and Ralph Ellison's nameless protagonist slowly becomes disillusioned with the Leftist Brotherhood in *Invisible Man* as well.

117

African American-owned periodicals (Hutchinson 50-51). Christopher Mulvey indicates that problems of authenticity and mediation have troubled the publication of African-American literature since the publication of slave narratives prior to the Civil War, and that the tendency of white publishers to remove the political context of writing by or about African-American writers resulted in bleached narratives that were merely sensational (Mulvey 21). With an increased black readership and greater mainstream interest in African-American literature, the *Bildungsromane* of this period became the site of contests over the role of white patronage in black culture that became part of a larger discussion over authentic African-American art, culture, and identity, as well as assimilation into a broader American culture and literary tradition. As later critics have discovered, even those novels that eschewed the "protest novel" label during this period can be read in an implicitly political context, and when modern African-American texts are understood as complicating the objectification of the black protagonist by a white readership, they can be devastatingly subversive.

A decade after Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, two African-American female authors also wrote *Bildungsromane* with protagonists able to pass as white. Nella Larsen's *Quicksand,* that Hazel Carby argues exhibits a black feminist consciousness that is twenty years ahead of its time (Carby 175), is followed by another *Bildung* novel by Larsen, *Passing*. The first novel by Larsen critiques a family's emphasis on race, male dominance, and the subordination of women. Jessie Fauset's *Plum Bun*, on the other hand, asserts black racial identity as a focus for developing personal identity as her protagonist discovers, through passing, that white society is corrupt and materialistic and decides to eventually return to her own race. Hutchinson points out that the subtitle of *Plum Bun*, "A Novel without a Moral," is likely in response to white Harlem Renaissance patron Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*, that had been

118

reviewed as "A Novel with a Moral." Fauset's novel exemplifies a pride in black identity that many African Americans believed white publishers rejected in favor of salacious and sensational tales of downtrodden people of color. Nella Larsen's *Passing* closely follows *Plum Bun* by a matter of weeks and features a dedication to Van Vechten and his wife. The ending of *Passing* inverts that of *Plum Bun*. At the end of *Plum Bun,* the *Bildungsheld* happily returns to the black community after a sojourn in white society; on the other hand, when the protagonist of *Passing*, Clare Kendry, attempts to return to the black community, her friend, Irene Redfield, who is both attracted to and repelled by Clare's ability to transgress racial boundaries, seems determined not to let her return. When another character exposes Clare's racial heritage, Clare either leaps out of a window to her death or is pushed by Irene. Larsen's treatment of passing differs from that of earlier authors. While Brown's *Clotel* used his protagonist as an example to undermine racist objectification of the black subject, and Johnson and Fauset use their characters in an attempt to demonstrate how white society is more violent or decadent than the black community, Larsen's transgressive subject undermines the dual oppositional structure that privileges one identity over the other. I will return to Larsen and discuss her novel in greater detail in the last chapter.

A romantic/primitivist strain of thought in Modernism concerned with rediscovering or recovering folk culture as authentic artistic expression pervades the texts of the Harlem Renaissance. While in some ways this return to folk traditions reinforces racially essentialist and oppositional forms of subjectivity, it also supports African-American efforts to critique the grand narratives associated with the dominant American culture. Authors involved in this return to folk tradition also find ways to rework the material of the past into a foundation for an agency that allows the nonidentical subject, if not instrumental control over identity, at least the ability to reject the denigration of the black identity imposed on him or her.

119

Like Jessie Fauset, Caribbean-born Claude McKay celebrated black folk culture in his work, specifically that of his native Jamaica, but many of his African critics, W.E.B. Du Bois among them, perceived his valorization of black culture and sexuality as catering to the prurient interests of a white readership (Hutchinson 58). McKay's *Bildungsroman* of a Jamaican woman's exile and return to the island anticipates later migration novels that will be briefly discussed in the next chapter, but his example had a profound impact on Langston Hughes's own semi-autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, *Not without Laughter*. Both novels celebrate blackness, even the objectified, sexualized beauty of the black body. Whereas American audiences saw McKay's protagonist Bita Plant as an exoticized Other, Hughes's James "Sandy" Rodgers is a familiar, working-class African-American character who is caught between his religiously conservative grandmother and blues-singing aunt, whose respective engagements with black culture are constructed as essentially oppositional. The novel is perhaps more accurately a novel of education or artistic development, as Hughes seems to imply that his protagonist migrates to Chicago in order to find a space to move toward synthesizing the "sacred" and the "profane" in his own work. As with other *Bildungsromane* written by male authors, the lack of parents typical of the *Bildungsroman* manifests specifically as the absence of a father figure and the suggestion that a protagonist's maturation depends on discovering manhood for himself; Geta LeSeur points out that Sandy, who is raised by three women, is often referred to as an "apron string boy" (LeSeur 82). A contemporary of Hughes, George Wylie Henderson, also wrote a *Bildungsroman* entitled *Ollie Miss* a few years later featuring a black female protagonist who, after struggling with poverty and being abandoned by the father of her child, finds redemption as a farmer and single mother. As Hutchinson points out in a brief discussion of the novel however, any sense of Henderson's protagonist overcoming or overturning the limits of her gender in her native

120

Alabama are undermined by the fact that she remains a tenant farmer on her uncle's farm (*ibid* 58-60). Frequently, and this presages Black Nationalist rhetoric in subsequent decades and the accompanying "Black is Beautiful" cultural movement of the 60s, the emphasis on a black essentialist identity underlines patriarchal gender roles, but this is not always true of *Bildungsromane* that emphasize the folk roots of African-American culture.

As an anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston also shared an interest in black folk tradition,[63] but two of her novels are meditations on African-American identification although, like Hughes and Henderson, her characters undergo their development in the South rather than as migrants to the North as was characteristic of later *Bildungsromane* of the Renaissance. Her first *Bildungsroman, Jonah's Gourd Vine,* features a philandering preacher named John Pearson[64] who, like Hughes's Sandy, struggles between two compelling desires: his ambitions to uplift the community of Eatonville, Florida as one of its religious leaders and the power, joy, and freedom he enjoys through his mastery of language. Eventually, Pearson turns his back on his wife while she's on her deathbed, and his fortunes take a turn for the worse. When Pearson finally begins to mend his ways and recover his wealth and reputation, he foolishly falls back into the same pattern of irresponsibility and arrogance when he is unfaithful to his new wife. Distracted by his

---

[63] *Jonah's Gourd Vine* frequently emphasizes the African origins of the folk culture featured in the novel. According to John Lowe in *Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston's Cosmic Comedy,* the novel demonstrates the power of African American folklore and its ability to sustain the community featured in the novel.

[64] One might be struck by the similarity between John Pearson and Gabriel, the father of the protagonist in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain.* Both characters resist their mother's attempts to rein in their wilder impulses, marrying long-suffering spouses tolerant of their infidelities, and then experience lapses of moral judgment that profoundly affect their relationship with their children. Rita Dove, in an introduction to the novel, points out that Hurston drew on autobiographical details related in *Dust Tracks on a Road* for the novel, and that the book effectively weaves Hurston's memories of her own parents into a fictional narrative.

guilt while returning to his wife, Pearson ends up walking in front of a train. Rita Dove describes Pearson as, "a man who does not learn from his mistakes [and] is doomed to repeat them" (*Jonah's Gourd* xiii). Unlike many of the *Bildungsromane* of the Negro Renaissance, Hurston's novels dwell less on contemporary interracial relations and emphasize instead the importance of self-appraisal to the black subject. The model of the character's own stepfather may inspire Pearson's infidelity and abuse of his wife, but Hurston's protagonist perpetuates the cycle of tragedy by failing to engage in honest self-appraisal.

Her second *Bildungsroman*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, imagines a liberatory trajectory for the development of her black female subject fueled by her increasing capacity for self-reflection and growing outspokenness. In an afterword in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes the structure of *Their Eyes* as a "journey from object to subject [in that] the narrative of the novel shifts from third to a blend of first and third person…signifying awareness of self in Janie" (*Jonah's Gourd* 209). In a similar fashion to the female characters in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, the greatest obstacle to her protagonist Janie's development is not white society, but the black men in her life who may decry their racial subordination but maintain their gendered dominance in their own communities.

George Hutchinson suggests the black readership of the time did not embrace Hurston's novels because the protest aspects of her texts were too subtle. Her ability to analyze African-American "double voicedness," as in her description of black field workers shifting from mute bodies in the presence of the white bossman into an animated and opinionated crowd, as well as her emphasis on self-discovery over political solidarity, also marked her as an "unruly" outsider to the readership of the Negro Renaissance (Hutchinson 60-61). Hurston's novels of development found a more sympathetic readership in the 1970s and 1980s with her rediscovery

by Alice Walker as black feminists found a public voice distinct from both black men and white women. Hurston was obviously ahead of her time. For decades the best-known *Bildung* novels were those by Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin, novels in that the narrated maturation of a masculine subject was identified as more-or-less representative of blackness in general.

In *Ten Is the Age of Darkness*, Geta LeSeur analyzes the Black *Bildungsroman* both in the United States and in the West Indies in specifically gendered terms as rites of sexual initiation. The conflict in the *Bildungsromane* by Wright, Baldwin, and Ellison is fundamentally a crisis of masculinity, as the young men in these novels have fathers who are actively hostile to them, in the case of Wright and Baldwin or, in the case of Ellison, the protagonist's development is sabotaged by a father figure. Women in these novels are nurturing or desirable, but all of them ultimately prove weak or corruptive, and these women lack the strong moral authority that even bad fathers seem to claim. Racist attacks on these black protagonists are often blunt attacks on their masculinity.

In *Black Boy*[65], the protagonist, Richard, feels antagonistic toward his father whose physical form he regards as repulsive, describing him as "fat" and "alien," and decades later when Richard tracks down his father on a Mississippi plantation, he recognizes him as a black peasant who was unable to reinvent himself in a metropolitan setting (LeSeur 94, Wright 34-5). His Uncle Tom identifies Richard as a troublemaker as soon as he takes Richard into his

---

[65] One might make the case that it is more accurate to describe *Black Boy* as a *Künstlerroman*, a novel of an artist's development, since Richard ultimately becomes a novelist. My focus here is on the way the narrator manipulates the protagonist's early experiences to tell his life's story rather than the development of his personal aesthetics, so I take that part of the novel as an example of *Bildungsroman*.

household and refuses to let him interact with his family, and in another scene, Uncle Tom tries to get him to comply with the black educational establishment by persuading Richard to read the principal's prepared speech when the young man becomes valedictorian. The women in Richard's life, his grandmother, mother, and aunts, either impose limits or introduce dangerous influences. His mother becomes extremely ill early in his life and can do little to mold or support him. His grandmother, who almost passes for white, restricts his literary education by discouraging him from reading anything but the Bible while his Aunt Addie tries to break his will when he is forced to attend her religious school. His Aunt Maggie becomes romantically involved with a criminal and flees with the man to the North. The difference between male and female authority figures to the narrator is that the female influences in his life are ones to be tricked, as in the case of his superstitious grandmother, or confronted, in the case of his Aunt Addie. However, even though Richard regards his Uncle Tom as a sellout to white society, he does his best to respect Tom's authority while in his household.

The novel makes it clear that behind the fear and violence encountered in the domestic family space is the desire to survive in the South under the constant threat of racial violence. Gender roles are distorted by pervasive racism, but at no time does the novel seem to interrogate how a domestic gendered hierarchy perpetuates the public racial hierarchy. There is a reason why, until the popular recovery of Hurston and greater critical interest in Larsen decades later, that all the major Harlem Renaissance novels are written by men; the leading intellectuals of the time viewed the experiences of female African-American novelists as supplemental to African-American subjectivity, and those of male novelists as representative.

With that caveat, *Black Boy* remains a moving and profound meditation on masculine African-American subjectivity. While *Not Without Laughter* was one of the first novels to utilize

the narrative structure of the escaped slave's flight from bondage to freedom in order to tell the story of a modern African-American subject moving from the racial oppression of the South to greater liberty in the North, Wright applies his genius for memoir to convey the gradations of experience involved in his development while in intimate contact with a racist culture. He articulates the presence of racism even in the absence of the direct experience of racism, writing:

> Nothing challenged the totality of my personality so much as this pressure of hate and threat that stemmed from the invisible whites. I would stand for hours on the doorsteps of neighbors' houses listening to their talk, learning how a white woman had slapped a black woman, how a white man had killed a black man… I did not know if the story was factually true or not, but it was emotionally true because I had already grown to feel that there existed men against whom I was powerless, men who could violate my life at will (73).

These stories of sudden, unprovoked violence shape Richard's emotional knowledge and understanding of white society, even before he has much direct experience of it; he fantasizes about what he might do if threatened, and these fantasies become "a culture, a creed, a religion" (74) that condition his responses and put him constantly on his guard. Wright attributes his ability to analyze these internal forces dispassionately to witnessing his mother suffer from near paralysis at an early age and his family's crushing poverty from fighting her illness. His mother's lingering, decade-long battle inspires in Richard the desire "to wring a meaning out of meaningless suffering," writing that empathy and skepticism "made me strangely tender and cruel, violent and peaceful," giving him an appreciation for psychology and a sense of loyalty toward those in rebellion (100-1). This passage evokes the tone of Aristotelian tragedy, that in the words of David Scott, in *Conscripts of Modernity*, "raises doubts about… the autonomy of

the self" offering "a literary-philosophical genre in that a number of consequential theoretical

shibboleths of our time are challenged… Above all, tragedy is troubled by the hubris of

enlightenment and civilization, power and knowledge" (Scott 12-13). This growing interest in

psychological assessment as a way of uncovering subconscious influences denotes the influence

of Freudian theory and other discourses associated with the social sciences on American

literature in general, and in African-American literature in particular, as psychoanalytic

assessment becomes a tool for diagnosing the wounds inflicted by racism on the black subject.

Black Boy's *Bildungsheld* hits upon a perspective that is distinctly African-American, modern,

and characterized by this hyper-awareness of modernity as a flawed engine. After several

difficult interactions with white employers who are baffled by his behavior, Richard reflects:

> I knew what was wrong with me, but I could not correct it. The words and actions of
>
> white people were baffling signs to me. I was living in a culture and not a civilization and
>
> I could learn how that culture worked only by living with it. Misreading the reactions of
>
> whites around me made me say and do the wrong things. In my dealing with whites I was
>
> conscious of the entirety of my relations with them, and they were conscious only of what
>
> was happening at a given moment. I had to keep remembering what others took for
>
> granted; I had to think out what others felt (196-7).

Subsequently, Richard points out how black subjectivity is shaped by racism, and how

rare a critical awareness of the unnatural relationships between white and black subjects is in

modern American culture, writing "I began to marvel at how smoothly the black boys acted out

the roles that the white race had mapped out for them. Most of them were not conscious of living

a special, separate, stunted way of life" (ibid). The emphasis on "culture" over "civilization" and

"acted" when referring to the racial "roles" of black men highlights how artificial Wright finds

126

the supposed nature of racial difference to be. Lacan's notion of the future anterior, described by Apollo Amoko and cited in the earlier Second Chapter, is in evidence here in *Black Boy* as the narrator reflects with insight on the development of the protagonist. Richard voices an awareness that something is missing in his life in the South that he cannot articulate several times throughout the novel. His reading of Sinclair Lewis and Dreiser (249-250) first spark this recognition of the *wrongness* of the South. He articulates this feeling as the narrator in a long parenthetical aside when considering the marginality of black life (265). He also becomes painfully aware of how he has internalized the South's *wrongness* as he struggles to overcome his racial conditioning after going to the North. Two incidents make him aware of this reflexive cringe: one is when he feels ashamed for lying about his discomfort to his employers the Hoffmans and another is when he barely stifles his fear at the friendly intimacy of the white server, Cora. Both incidents make him aware of the narrowness and reductive ideology that he has uncritically accepted (268-272). All these examples point toward the lens of the narrator's mature consciousness restructuring Richard's experiences.

Enforced marginality becomes a way of thinking critically about one's own development and turns past trauma into material for Wright's authoritative voice. Again, the structure of the narrative is fundamentally one of resistance to oppression providing the strength to flee regions inhospitable to full development and expression, followed by a struggle to survive, or perhaps outlive, the aftereffects of trauma, and ending with deliverance, in the sense of finding one's voice and/or becoming socially empowered, if not completely secure. Like Hughes's novel and many other African-American *Bildungsromane* that frequently touch upon the importance of literacy in "coming to voice" (*Talking Back* 12), Wright's novel ends with the protagonist becoming a published writer, and might be more properly described as a *Künstlerroman*, a

narrative of the artist's development. Two elements of Wright's texts promise different forms of African-American subjectivity beyond that of an artist, one based on a return to Africa and represented by Richard's fleeting comments about the Garveyites (286) and the other political and related by his more detailed and troubled relationship with the Communist Party, first with Black Communists (294-296) and later with the party as a whole when he decides to function as a sort of rhetorical mediator between the Communists and black communities, writing, "I would address my words to two groups: I would tell Communists how common people felt, and I would tell common people of the self-sacrifice of Communists who strove for unity among them" (320). Richard rejects the first and is ultimately disillusioned with the later although perhaps these abortive movements toward distinct social identities culminate in the unresolved and divided but more self-aware subject of the novel. Ralph Ellison, while implying in his introduction to *Invisible Man* that his novel is a response to Afro-American protagonists like Bigger Thomas in Wright's *Native Son* that are "caught up in the most intense forms of social struggle…but yet seldom able to articulate those issues that tortured them" because they are portrayed as "without intellectual depth," really seems to be basing his novel's unnamed narrator on Wright's autobiographical narrator in *Black Boy*.

Claudine Raynaud, in "Coming of Age in the African American Novel," finds a dynamic in the African American *Bildungsroman* that is reminiscent of Nancy Armstrong's description of how the novel creates interiority: "The *Bildungsroman* offers the 'plot' of an apprenticeship of the concurrent mutual shaping of the protagonist's psyche and his integration with society at large." Whereas the early modern European *Bildungsroman* focuses on the harmonious socialization of its protagonist, balancing personal growth with guided socialization, Raynaud sees in the split between the didactic protest novel of Wright and the impressionistic "open

narrative" novel of Ellison a "reopening" of the fusion affected by the *Bildungsromane* of England and the Continent in the previous century. She describes a return to something resembling the *Entwicklungsroman* novel of subjective individuality ("the Misfit" in Armstrong's estimation) and the *Erziehungsroman* novel of objective education (the demands of socialization) (Raynaud 108-109).

The second model of development, the *Erziehungsroman*, in its initial African-American literary incarnation, one might consider implicit in the structure of the African-American slave narrative. This is a structure that remains as the basis of WEB DuBois's, and possibly Hurston's, notion of "uplift" in black subjectivity: sexual initiation, early education, rejection of paternalism (personal or societal), embrace of social responsibility, and departure from home. Artists like Wright increasingly question the authenticity of this form of African-American subjectivity, stable from emancipation until the second decade of the twentieth century. This split often causes the protagonist of the African-American *Bildungsroman* to alienate its own black readership, as readers may see the preoccupation of a protagonist with aesthetics to be at odds with political awareness. These two different models also seem to dictate different relationships with the culture of the oppressor. One model advocates for political liberation, and the other implies greater engagement.

The model that Wright initiates in its African-American literary form, the model reminiscent of the *Entwicklungsroman*, attempts to show the positive development of the subject in his or her struggle against racism, poverty, and violence, a story of individual agency asserted against an oppressive society, and this form of development manifests as protest novels like *Native Son*, with a Romantic, utopian strain suggestive of the "anticolonialism" later criticized

by David Scott and first described by Bernard Yack as "total revolution" (Scott 5).[66] With

respect toward subjective agency, the outcome of this hoped-for revolution will be the freedom

of self-actualization, instrumental control over self-creation unhampered by oppressive power.

Wright's novels cleave more closely to this counter-modern trend; a voice raised in protest will

eventually result in something like true autonomy. Ellison's position on subjectivity in *Invisible*

Man is closer to that of British modernists like T.S. Eliot in "The Love Song of J. Alfred

Prufrock," in that, Peter Childs argues in his book *Modernism*, the poem's protagonist is a split

being, paralyzed as an object of scrutiny and deriving no agency from his awareness (Hall 63).[67]

Raynaud indicates that the traditional modern European *Bildungsroman* includes the

decadence of the hero, revealing the "cynicism inherent in bourgeois values" and exposing "the

upstart, the 'parvenu'" (Raynaud 109). In the chapter of this work on Wilde, I argued that there

---

[66] David Scott bases his own argument on Yack's book *The Longing for Total Revolution*, that he says "is animated by a certain skepticism regarding the specific shape of modern social and political discontent and the radical hopes and expectations and demands that have often been derived from that discontent" (5). The problem that Yack points out is that "these radical hopes and expectations and demands are philosophically incoherent as well as practically impossible, and only a comprehensive revision of our understanding of the philosophical sources of the discontent that inspires them can begin to clarify our contemporary predicaments, and open out possible cognitive-political paths beyond them" (ibid). Scott invokes Hayden White's *Metahistory*, to explain the "myth model" behind "anticolonialism" as distinctly Romantic in narrative form and suggests that in CLR James's 1963 revision of his 1938 book *The Black Jacobins*, his narrative model for his history moves from Romantic "anticolonialism" to a tragic narrative (7-9) that, in Scott's word, "sets before us the image of a man or woman obliged to act in a world in that values are unstable and ambiguous" (13). In his discussion of James, Scott is describing a postmodern turn in the Trinidadian historian's writing, and this essay attempts to sketch a similar turn in the way James's contemporary African-American authors wrote about black subjectivity.

[67] In his book *Subjectivity*, Donald E. Hall argues against Peter Child's reading, suggesting that Prufrock may not express agency amounting to instrumental self-control, but the poem does function as an attempt to shock the reader out "drowning in the sea of our own anxieties" over this lack of instrumentality (Hall 64). If this optimistic reading can be applied to *Prufrock*, it is possible to see the ending of *Invisible Man* as offering the modern subject a way out of passive socialization.

was a movement in the modern British *Bildungsroman* away from harmonious socialization toward a decadence that eschewed this kind of untroubled subjective development/education. We touched briefly on how the protagonist of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suppresses male-male desire and his working class affiliations, veiling them to create an internal "negative self" belied by his public face. While the decadent *Bildung* in that novel occluded elements of subjectivity retrograde to harmonious socialization, Raynaud argues that the African-American version of the high modernist *Bildungsroman* is subversive. I am of the opinion that the template for this subversive approach toward modern subjectivity appears in Wright's *Black Boy*, but Raynaud points out that *Invisible Man* involves "the gradual deconstruction of the various versions of the narrator's identity," debunking "Booker T. Washington's ideal of a school system, the dream of the Great Migration to the urban North, the hope of a political solution through the Brotherhood (the Communist party), and of a religious solution in the satire of the Nation of Islam" (ibid). In other words, Ellison deliberately returns to the structure of the slave narrative and the uplift model of education, but twists it to subversive, satirical ends. Wright's memoir seems to suggest that if the obstacles to the subject's natural development are overcome, there is a possibility for total transformation. Ellison's novel points out the limits of both those narratives that promise harmonious socialization and those that point toward some sort of total revolution, suggesting the possibility of resistance as a means to bring about change. Ellison's *Invisible Man* represents a powerful and deliberate attack on American concepts of black subjective development, a case of what Henry Louis Gates Jr. might identify as signifyin (g), a text that relies on context to allude to meanings beyond its basic structure and, like Wilde's "love that dare not speak its name," hide the nonidentical within a tale of attempted harmonious socialization. By invoking Gates, I don't mean to say that Ellison draws upon the trickster figure of African American folk tradition;

131

Ellison specifically rejects that reading of *Invisible Man* by Stanley Edgar Hyman in his essay "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" in *Shadow and Act* (45-59). The point Ellison makes in that essay is that the black minstrel as a trickster is a creation of white cultural tradition, and it involves a white man putting on the mask of blackness. He writes that one of the ironies of this masquerade is that it exposes an "old American problem of identity" as "out of counterfeiting of the black American's identity there arises a profound doubt in the white man's mind as to the authenticity of his own image of himself," the awareness that the American identity stems and is contingent on their rejection of a British identity (53). By creating a character of intellectual depth, psychological complexity, and no name to identify him, only the blackness of his skin, I submit that Ellison creates in *Invisible Man* a mask for any reader to wear, and that this precipitates the profound doubts about the authenticity of the reader's own image. At the end of *Invisible Man*, the narrator breaks through the fictive world of the novel and addresses the reader directly, stating that his aim in "shaking off the old skin" is to dispense with the "pattern to the chaos within the pattern of your certainties," and that perhaps "on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (580-1).

In his essay on *Black Boy*, "Richard Wright's Blues" from *Shadow and Act*, Ellison argues that whatever artistic flaws critics perceive in Wright's autobiography can be attributed to the author's attempts to capture the character of development in the South, that is stymied by what Ellison calls a mis-education, a retardation of sentiment in both Southern whites and blacks brought on by a racial animosity that encourages what he terms a pre-individual culture that sees others as nothing more than part of their respective racial groups. Ellison suggests that Wright begins struggling against this culture when he is unable to distinguish between his light-skinned grandmother and the local whites and becomes skeptical of the near-supernatural status attached

132

to whiteness, and later, he is able to discover the "moral and ideological equivalents of his childhood attitudes" (87) only when he is able to reflect on his childhood in the North. Ellison's protagonist in *Invisible Man* differs from Wright-as-narrator in *Black Boy* most notably in that the poverty, violence, and dearth of educational opportunities that Wright suffered are absent at the beginning of Ellison's novel. While Ellison notes that Wright's early experiences leave him trying to "give that violence significance" (83) in his writing, trying to impose order on that chaos, Ellison's own Southern protagonist moves from identity to identity, increasingly finding each one in turn to be nothing more than an ill-fitting mask; in the end, the narrator of *Invisible Man* suggests that his condition is not so dissimilar from that of his readers, "a disembodied voice" "invisible and without substance" (581).

In his 1981 introduction to *Invisible Man,* Ellison relates how he was inspired to write the novel after he realized that a black protagonist trying to assert his right of self-definition in a short story he'd written also had difficulty in seeing himself. A second story, about a black soldier in Wales who is surprised when locals greet him as a "Black Yank" and is forced to think about his racial and national identity in the process, further contributed to Ellison's meditation on how the "high visibility" of African-Americans as a race resulted in their invisibility as individuals (*xiii-xv*). In conceiving of his character, Ellison indicates that he deliberately tried to avoid writing a protest novel, conceiving of a voice that was "less angry than ironic" (*xviii*), a speaker distinct from "most protagonists of Afro-American fiction (not to mention the black characters in fiction written by whites)" that might exhibit intellectual depth (*xix*) and reveal "the human universals hidden within the plight of one who was both black and American" (*xxii*).

The protagonist's invisibility, the central problem of the novel, involves a perceived lack of interiority and difference from the aggregate of his race, even for the protagonist himself. The

133

development of the *Bildungsheld* of *Invisible Man* notes the insufficiency of identification with equally limiting, sometimes crippling ontological social models, as well as the artificial character of these personae[68]. In addition, Ellison's critique of each model probes the theoretical foundations framing their subjectivity. First, there are model identities arising from racial and regional strategies for coping with oppression embodied by Southern models like Bledsoe and the veteran. Second, there are also models involving urban class-consciousness, exemplified by characters like Lucius Brockway and Clifton. Third, there are those models derived from a remote ethnic heritage demonstrated by Peter Wheatstraw and Ras the Exhorter, and those that are the object of legal or religious institutions like Brother Tarp or Rinehart. Lastly, there are models that are the objects of medical psychology, such as the veteran and later the narrator.

In an essay, Joseph F. Trimmer explains how the origin of the narrator of *Invisible Man*'s crisis of identity stems from the riddle his grandfather posed on his deathbed to his children and grandchildren. The older man says:

> Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a way and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open (Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 16).

---

[68] As Ellison's character never settles into a discernible shape and the narrator of the novel is evasive about his design in relating the story of his life, it may be that the novel's reflections on identity do not result in recognizable *Bildung*. The novel may point to the exhaustion of the *Erziehungsroman* model of development as the protagonist becomes as thin and supple as one of Clifton's puppets by the end of the novel.

Trimmer argues that this riddle defines every choice the narrator of the novel makes and that he presents a series of solutions to the riddle in the Epilogue (Trimmer 46). His grandfather's advice is a riddle because it is seemingly a contradiction: the grandfather regrets betraying his people by laying down his gun, but then prompts his descendants to continue pursuing a strategy of conciliation that will undermine those who oppress them. Although the narrator pursues a strategy of conciliation during the Battle Royal chapter of the novel, his demeanor is sincere and his model is Booker T. Washington rather than his grandfather. Battered for the amusement of his white patrons during the Battle Royal, the narrator stumbles during his speech and utters "social equality," then at their prompting, amends that to "social responsibility." He is rewarded with a briefcase and a scholarship, but that night he dreams of sitting with his grandfather at a circus. The older man refuses to laugh at the clowns, but when the narrator opens his briefcase and reads the document within engraved with the words "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running," the old man begins to laugh. As Trimmer and others[69] have suggested, the clowns, with makeup that conceal their faces and ridiculous behavior, are no laughing matter for the grandfather, but the narrator's self-deception is cause for hilarity. The agony of the narrator in the Battle Royal scene is the white patron's insistence on his responsibility for his own self-creation as a subject and simultaneous threat when he utters the word "equality," suggesting some sort of parity with them. In turn, the narrator later comes into the conflict with the Brotherhood over the assumption of personal responsibility rather than deference to the group (463). The form that this conflict takes depends on the context in that the narrator finds himself in and models of subjection available to him.

---

[69] Eleanor R. Wilner differentiates between fools and clowns in her article "The Invisible Black Thread: Identity and Non-Identity in *Invisible Man*" and, more recently, Christopher Shinn has explored masquerade and the carnivalesque in some scenes of the novel.

The first part of the novel, set in the South, features three characters that function as ontological models that the protagonist may emulate or reject. The first is Trueblood, the man who confesses to raping his daughter and remains an object of fascination for white visitors like Mr. Norton. While Trueblood's willingness to satisfy white stereotypes about the insatiability and deviancy of black sexuality accords with the grandfather's advice, as Trueblood exploits white curiosity for material gain, the narrator is repelled by his lack of dignity. Bledsoe also represents a man, like the grandfather, who passively accedes to the demands of his rich, white, northern patrons in exchange for a measure of power, and the narrator at first exhibits a strong desire to mimic Bledsoe's model and achieve the same status, but ultimately, Bledsoe's revelation of his willingness to sacrifice others to preserve the status quo is so shocking that the narrator cannot accept that it really happened. Both Trueblood and Bledsoe accept the welfare and the power that come with identification with the roles assigned to them, but little has any real desire for any agency deriving from their resistance to these roles. The figure of the veteran is distinct from them in that, despite being the victim of racism after returning from higher education and war, he feels he has some sense of control over who he is, as he advises the narrator, "…look beneath the surface… Play the game, but don't believe in it… Play the game but play it your own way… Learn how it operates, learn how you operate" (153-4) and later "Be your own father, young man" (156). While the veteran trained as a doctor and developed a proud public demeanor overseas, he returned to the South to find that the exercise of this identity was extremely limited; while he serves as a warning that the narrator's subject position is shaped by the culture and community he occupies, the veteran also presents the optimistic possibility of resistance and escape from those conditions.

The urban environment that the narrator moves to as a break from his studies exposes him to a new community that provides different models. He spends some time working at Liberty Paints and encounters the basement foreman, Lucius Brockway. While Brockway is a self-trained engineer and enjoys the ear of the factory's management, having coined the slogan, "If it's Optic White, it's the Right White" (217), he draws only a janitor's pay (211), feels he has to guard his position jealously against younger and better educated men, and regards union laborers with murderous hostility. Like the grandfather, Brockway's servility, internalized as a pathetic identification with management against his own self-interest (229), is ultimately destructive to everyone as he allows the factory machine to blow up, devastating the building. As a counter-point to Brockway, Brother Tarp, an elderly member of the Brotherhood's Harlem branch, confides in the narrator his history of resistance that has led to decades on a prison chain gang and a disability. While Lucius is a character who derives any sense of worth or political awareness from his employers, Tarp does not paint a more hopeful picture of subjectivity through resistance. Unlike the veteran, he did not even enjoy a modicum of liberty in that he was able to exert some small measure of self-determination; instead, Tarp's body is devastated from his futile efforts to fight back against his oppressors. Following his grandfather's example, the narrator chooses to work for the Brotherhood, but when the Brotherhood moves the narrator from Harlem, his fellow operative Tod Clifton rejects the Brotherhood and resists by selling Sambo dolls on the street, an allusion to the narrator being a puppet of the Brotherhood. When Clifton further resists being hailed as a criminal by a white police officer, the encounter leads to Clifton being mortally wounded, and the narrator becomes bent on a more destructive course of action when he eulogizes his fallen comrade and provokes Harlem to riot.

There are moments in the novel when the narrator comes across familiar elements that remind him of his ethnic heritage, such as the indigent Peter Wheatstraw (173-4) whose songs invoking folk traditions later come back to the narrator when he's recovering from the injuries he sustained at Liberty Paints (242) and whose rhythms he exploits when he's speaking out against injustice (279-280) and on behalf of the Brotherhood (342). While the narrator resists his position as a Southern subject steeped in black folklore at first (e.g. rejecting pork chops in favor of eggs, 178), he later acknowledges his heritage and his Southern identity when he consumes yams from a street vendor (263), and when he sings Southern spirituals at Clifton's funeral (452-3).[70] The novel suggests, and Ellison asserts in *Shadow and Act* (58), that this folk inheritance has literary value when its content is utilized by an artist that can "translate its meanings into wider, more precise vocabularies" (*ibid*, 59). The narrator adapts the call and response of the Southern church to his speeches and thinks of his earliest memories of Buckeye Rabbit when he doesn't remember his own name because those images function in those specific circumstances. In contrast, Ras the Exhorter's, once he becomes Ras the Destroyer, invocation of African imagery during the Harlem riot makes him look as absurd as he is frightening. While Ras exerts a strong, distinctly essentialist notion of black subjectivity that appeals to Tod Clifton and stands in stark contrast to the narrator's mixing of Southern folklore in his Marxist rhetoric, Ras's profound investment in the ridiculous image of himself is what ultimately leads the narrator to "recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine" (559). A group of Harlemites later mockingly compare Ras's epic charge to the Lone Ranger; Ras has drawn so

---

[70] Online research indicates that the song in the novel, entitled "There's Many a Thousand Gone," may be based on the song "No More Auction Block for Me" that contains the line, "many a thousand gone." A recording of the song by Paul Robeson and Alan Booth can be found on an album by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

deeply from his African heritage that those people he proposes to lead do not recognize the trappings that establish his oppositional identity.

There are two moments in the novel in that the narrator's existence is threatened and he most resembles a de-centering subject with no fixed point of reference for identity. The first is after the explosion at Liberty Paints. The narrator wakes in a hospital and is sedated and kept there even though the diagnosis is simple shock. He undergoes electro-shock therapy, as doctors discuss the possibility of performing a lobotomy or castration to curb his supposed criminal tendencies. When they ask the narrator who he is, he is unable to answer, but reacts to their mention of Buckeye the Rabbit, a figure from his childhood, experiencing what he calls an "old identity" that annoys him. The narrator begins worrying about the nature of his identity, and he suspects that he's engaged in some sort of a struggle with those who wish to cure him:

> I suspected that I was really playing a game with myself and that they were taking part. A kind of combat… I imagined myself whirling about in my mind like an old man attempting to catch a small boy in some mischief, thinking, Who am I? It was no good. I felt like a clown. Nor was I up to being both criminal and detective- though why criminal I didn't know.

> I fell to plotting ways of short-circuiting the machine…Whoever else I was, I was no Samson. I had no desire to destroy myself even if it destroyed the machine; I wanted freedom, not destruction. It was exhausting, for no matter what the scheme I conceived, there was one constant flaw- myself. There was no getting around it. I could no more escape than I could think of my identity. Perhaps, I thought, the two things are involved with each other. When I discover who I am, I'll be free (242-3).

The image of Samson is telling as Ellison uses it when describing the narrator's grandfather in *Shadow and Act*: "Samson, eyeless in Gaza, pulls the building down when his strength returns; politically weak, the grandfather has learned that conformity leads to a similar end, and so advises his children" (56). The narrator seems to understand both conformity to the discourse of the racially and economically oppressive society and resistance to it will lead to individual and eventually societal enfeeblement and searches for a third option. The second moment of existential threat is when the narrator faces Ras the Destroyer's followers and, at first, disguises himself as a character named Rinehart to escape them. Rinehart is a master of masquerade, moving among criminals, police men, and church goers with ease and adopting a different persona for each. The sensation is almost too much for the narrator, as he feels himself taking on a gait and mode of speech based on circumstance rather than desire; even though he is invisible to his enemies, his friend Barrelhouse also mistakes him for someone else, and he feels compelled to act the part. In *Shadow and Act*, Ellison describes Rinehart as a "mode of escape from Ras, and a means of applying, in yet another form, his grandfather's cryptic advice to his own situation" (57). The narrator eventually rejects the chameleon identity of Rinehart, and by acknowledging the absurdity of the various ontological models he has emulated while still refusing an inauthentic and circumstantial identity, he experiences a kind of disillusionment in the epilogue of the novel. In the narrator's words, he learns "to live without direction" and embrace the contradictions in his grandfather's heritage, saying, "I condemn and affirm, say no and say yes, say yes and say no" (577, 579).

The subject position of the narrator of *Invisible Man* at the end of the novel is that of the modern subject on the verge of history: cut off from old, essentialist ontological modes but

wondering how to make use of his experiences to construct a new self with the limited agency derived from self-knowledge.

Where Ellison's opus is monologic, James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* opens up the genre of the African-American *Bildungsroman* to the presence of dialogic voices that frame the story of the protagonist's subjective formation. In his essay on Ellison and Baldwin, "Finding Common Ground," Herman Beavers describes the characters of both authors as "engaged in attempts to fashion for themselves adequate narrative space, to become agents, actors, and subjects."[71] Both authors, Beavers writes, create novels featuring characters isolated from community due to grave personal injuries. In the case of *Invisible Man*, the narrator feels compelled by his grandfather's advice to maintain a mask that both protects him from an oppressive white society and keeps his identity a mystery, even from the protagonist himself. On the other hand, John Grimes, the protagonist of James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, is the victim of familial forces whose origins are hidden from him, as the man he believes is his father punishes him for his mother's out-of-wedlock pregnancy. The two authors approach this woundedness in different ways. The narrator of *Invisible Man*'s suffering is almost comical at times, as he is thrown from place to place like Odysseus being swept from island to island, the pain he experiences "marks the ritual process the hero must endure in order to achieve insight" (Beavers 191). Every time the narrator of *Invisible Man* suffers a setback as a result of his "affirmation of the mistaken beliefs of others," he gains in self-knowledge and becomes better

---

[71] Beavers borrows these terms from Michel-Rolph Trouillot, who in *Silencing the Past: Power and Production in History*, argue that "history involves peoples in three constant capacities: 1) as agents, or occupants of social positions, 2) as actors, in constant interface with a context, and 3) as subjects… as voices aware of their vocality" (Trouillot 23). As these terms add nuance to the idea of liberation or agency discussed in the context of the *Bildungsheld*'s struggle for identification, they will be useful in discussing the outcome of postmodern *Bildungsromane*.

equipped to function as an actor in the surreal world he inhabits. In the case of John Grimes, the pain he experiences does not result in greater self-knowledge since only the reader becomes aware of the stories of his mother, stepfather, and aunt while Grimes remains ignorant. Instead, John wins a place of respect in his church and gains increased agency in his household. The outcome for the hero of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is not final or ideal, but it is a form of liberation achieved through identification with a community outside of his family that allows a modicum of power over his self and freedom from his father's influence. Each story in the novel, from the perspective of the characters who have the greatest influence over John's life, involves a search for escape from oppression and the discovery of a conditional and limited liberty over themselves as subjects.

Three "prayers," histories associated with adult characters in John's life, compromise the core of the book and John's struggles with maturity frame them: his status as a fourteen-year-old in a troubled family, his experiences of burgeoning homosexual desire, and his conversion to his stepfather's religion. The first prayer is that of John's Aunt Florence. She and her brother Gabriel are the children of a single mother in the South. Their mother prays often for Gabriel, who is wild and irresponsible, and instills in Florence her obligation to help him. Strict gender roles are enforced:

> There was only one future in that house, and it was Gabriel's- to that, since Gabriel was a manchild, all else must be sacrificed. Her mother did not, indeed, think of it as a sacrifice, but as logic: Florence was a girl, and would by and by be married, and have children of her own, and all the duties of a woman; and this being so, her life in the cabin was the best possible preparation for her future life. But Gabriel was a man; he would go out one day into the world to do a man's work, and he needed, therefore, meat, when there was

142

any in the house, and clothes, whenever clothes could be bought, and the strong indulgence of his womenfolk, so that he would know how to be with women when he had a wife. And he needed the education that Florence desired far more than he, and that she might have got if he had not been born (78).

Florence's circumstances are similar to that of Tambu, the protagonist of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, discussed earlier. When their mother contracts a mortal illness, Florence announces that she is leaving for the North to escape being a servant to her brother with her only real prospect involving becoming the servant of her husband if she marries a local man. When she leaves for the North, she ends up marrying a man named Frank, and her combative relationship with him mimics the one she had with her brother until he abandons her for another woman. She later wonders whether the fighting was worth it, or if her struggling with the male privilege exhibited first by her brother and then her husband wasn't ultimately self-destructive. She advises Elizabeth, John's mother, in light of Gabriel's abusive and morally high-handed attitude toward Elizabeth and John, to use a letter she has to expose Gabriel's infidelity to his first wife. While she, out of all the characters, has found the voice to speak out, and eventually reveals to Gabriel that she knows what he has done, she also experiences the same crushing isolation experienced by John. She fears dying alone, and she is both an example of resistance and a cautionary tale to John.

John's stepfather Gabriel's prayer, following Florence's story of his youthful dissipation, relates how he feels compelled to tend to his sick mother after Florence abandons them and how he marries Deborah, Florence's childhood friend, as a means of penance for his past sins. Gabriel discovers he has a talent as a preacher and rises to a position of influence and respect in his small town, but like the pastor in Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Gabriel submits to temptation, and

143

his pride will not allow him to admit his blame. An affair with a woman named Esther produces

a son, Royal, and after Esther leaves town and dies, her son returns to live with her parents.

Gabriel never acknowledges his son and watches helplessly as the boy's rebelliousness

eventually gets him killed. Gabriel maintains the integrity and coherence of his own self-image

as a god-fearing man beset by wickedness by imposing a nonidentical and oppositional identity

on the women in his life. He decides that Florence failed in her duty as a daughter and as a wife,

and so believes that she deserves to be alone. He resents Deborah because he sees his marriage to

her as forcing him to choose her over Esther. He sees Esther as a harlot because she tempted him

to have an affair. Finally, he sees Elizabeth and John as ungrateful beneficiaries of his largesse

who don't deserve god's mercy while his second, natural-born son, Roy, appears to be headed on

the same self-destructive path as his first. While Gabriel, despite his frequent failings, retains a

great deal of agency as a deacon in the Temple of the Fire Baptized, he is the character with the

least understanding of himself as he disavows responsibility for his own mistakes and blames

others for his self-imposed miseries.

The third prayer is that of Elizabeth, John's mother. Unlike the other two adult figures in

John's life, Elizabeth has a father who loves her but no mother, only an aunt whom she says

speaks of love as "something else- a bribe, a threat, an indecent will to power." Elizabeth, on the

other hand, "knew that the kind of imprisonment that love might impose was also, mysteriously,

a freedom for the soul and spirit, was water in the dry place, and had nothing to do with the

prisons, churches, laws, rewards, and punishments, that so positively cluttered the landscape of

her aunt's mind" (183). Like Gabriel and, to a lesser extent, Florence, Elizabeth's aunt is unable

to understand human relationships as anything but the exercise of power, often inflected by some

sort of institutional discourse. Florence resists her mother's imposition of gendered roles, and

144

Gabriel sees the prestige he gains from his marriage to Deborah and disavowing of his hedonistic lifestyle as both empowering and imprisoning him. Elizabeth does not actively resist the power that her aunt, or her first love Richard, or her husband Gabriel imposes upon her as Florence might; instead, she remains silent, declining to tell her aunt about her involvement with Richard, neglecting to press Richard to get married or tell him when she becomes pregnant, and finally, refusing to either denounce her involvement with Richard when she knows that is what Gabriel wants or even rise to defend it. Like Deborah, her actions are aimed at enduring hardships and finding meaning in the sacrifices she makes for others. While she does not choose to speak out against oppression like Florence or become complicit in institutional power like Gabriel, Elizabeth seems the most self-aware and at peace with her choices out of the various "saints" described in these "prayers."

John's conversion on the threshing room floor has three stages. First, he feels invaded by a possessing force and hears first a "malicious, ironic voice" insisting that he abandon the temple, but after a moment of terror, he feels that "the Spirit spoke, and spoke in him." Out of this, John conceives a desire "to speak in tongues, as Elisha spoke, and, with that authority, to confound his father" (228-9). The voice he discovers in the first phase is not his own, but it does offer a form of empowerment by granting him the authority that his father wants to deny him. In the second stage, John fears his father's punishment for his sin, and the novel frames this sin specifically in terms of homoerotic desire by juxtaposing John's thoughts of masturbation and Noah lying naked in his tent. In this vision, Gabriel tries to impose an oppositional identity on John by calling him, "the Devil's son," but John manages to turn Gabriel's judgment back on him by asking, "Whose son are you?" Even though Gabriel strikes him in the vision, John laughs; by pointing out Gabriel's own imperfection, John gains a degree of parity with his father.

145

The man may hurt him in the future, but John no longer feels he is responsible for the pain his father inflicts. The third stage of John's conversion involves the understanding of his suffering as not just personal or moral, but also historical. He has a vision of the suffering of black men and women during the African Diaspora and slavery, but this is followed by a momentary glimpse of his personal salvation foreshadowing a collective deliverance.

Despite the conclusion in that John becomes saved and joins the church, apparently following in his stepfather's footsteps, earlier scenes imply that this conversion will not last, that John's vision and salvation are temporary subject positioning to give him greater agency over his life. The novel begins on John's fourteenth birthday, the threshold of maturity, and as John contemplates manhood, he is determined not to become like his father (13). His identity consists of the intelligence that his mother and teachers praise in him, an understanding and sympathy inextricably bound to the "wickedness" that his father accuses him of. Although John declares that he cannot "bow before the throne of grace without first kneeling to his father" (15), eventually John becomes an initiate of the Temple of the Fire Baptized without betraying his intention to make a life for himself without becoming like his stepfather. The foundation of this distinct subjectivity pervades the first pages of the novel: John's attraction to male bodies, his desire to avoid hating white people like his father, his fervent wish to love and be loved in turn.

A telling instance of how John's subjectivity, even when he joins the church, will invert his stepfather's sympathies occurs when John comes across a poster for a film and decides to see it for his birthday. The poster shows a "wicked woman, half undressed, leaning in a doorway, apparently quarreling with a blond man who stared wretchedly into the street. The legend above their heads was: 'There's a fool like him in every family- and a woman next door to take him over!'" (36). John initially identifies with the young blond man as "the fool in his family" and

146

goes to the movie to discover what happens to him. The film depicts the woman as irredeemably evil and the young man as devoted and long-suffering in his support of her. As becomes clear later in the novel, the image Gabriel, John's father, has of himself is similar to this young man; he sees himself as long-suffering and devoted in his support of his first wife, burdened with the social stigma as a result of her rape by white men, as well as of his second wife, John's mother, who had a child out of wedlock, and perhaps he even sees himself as the "fool" who tries to redeem Esther, the "wicked" mother of his first son. John, who at first connects to the young man, soon comes to sympathize completely with the rebellious woman, admiring how "nothing tamed or broke her, nothing touched her, neither kindness, nor scorn, nor hatred, nor love… He wanted to be like her, only more powerful, more thorough, and more cruel" (38). Herman Beavers comments that the novel makes a radical break from racial social convention when the protagonist of his *Bildungsroman* finds inspiration in "a white female who manifests what might be described as a masculine posture… [and] by having John identify spectorially with a white female who embodies transgressive behavior, Baldwin insinuates John's sexual difference and articulates the manner in that Baldwin advocates an alternative strategy for the formation of a black male subjectivity that eschews the notion that masculinity and femininity are mutually exclusive sites in favor of a consciousness that seeks to manifest the best characteristics of both" (Beavers 196). To the extent that John identifies as a member of the Temple of the Fire Baptized, it is to gain some measure of power to resist his stepfather's cruelty toward him, and he does so by making a connection between his suffering and powerlessness with the historical suffering of black men and women in his vision (239-242).

Baldwin's protagonist in the novel posits a universally accessible subjectivity that is sympathetic due to its marginalization and indeterminacy. "John Grimes" is effectively the

creation of those people and institutions that he intersects with as a subject, the confluence of aunt, stepfather, mother, and religion. This acceptable self is complicated by a vague awareness of the historical forces weighing down on him as a member of a particular ethnicity in a specific nation, and all of that combines with his own biological desires as a boy just discovering his sexuality and gender identity.

These elements that appear in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, its multi-voiced narrative, de-centering subject, varied ontological models that present different strategies for empowerment, the juxtaposition of the protagonist's biography against the background of history, not only persist in the *Bildungsromane* of African-American authors. They also inform novels of subjectivity from writers in other communities that must contend with marginalization in Anglophone literature. In the next chapter, we will examine how the African-American *Bildungsroman* grows in the second half of the twentieth century under the auspices of Second and Third Wave Feminism into a minority genre that embraces the experiences of migrants from the Black Caribbean and how the experiences of women of color intersect in contemporary American culture.

CHAPTER FIVE

FEMINIST AFRICAN-AMERICAN *BILDUNGSROMANE*

An earlier chapter related how Ngugi Thiong'o described Anglophone African literature as less than authentic African literature; instead, he called it, "another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature" (*Decolonizing* 27). His vision seems to be of a monolithic English literary tradition that has colonized an African tradition, creating minority traditions that depend on the English language for their clarity and African inventiveness for their vitality, but never rising above their subsidiary status. What then, can we make of the African-American literary tradition, as critics further subdivide it into the literature of women of color and the literature of black Caribbean immigrants? Is this body of literature diminished through a kind of literary and critical Balkanization?

Anyone who has witnessed the diverse flowering of literature and literary criticism over the past few decades will know this is not the case. There has been a fundamental shift in representations of subjectivity in minority and African-American literature from an oppositional black American subject, opposed to the "universal" modern subject posited by mainstream literature in the twentieth century, to a greater variety of subject positions, due for the most part to the lens provided by Third-Wave Feminist criticism. This has been a gradual process, starting in the Harlem Renaissance, and continuing into the first two decades of the Twenty-First Century. The black female body has, since the earliest examples of African-American literature, been a site of racial and political contention. In literature, black female migrants have more

directly addressed issues of hybridity and transgression than their male counterparts have, and sexual and political revolutions for women have gone hand in hand. Finally, women of color have rewritten texts by African-American male authors grounded in patriarchy and sexism in order to circumscribe a literary space where new generations of women might flourish. This chapter will provide examples from the coming-of-age novels of Nella Larsen, Paule Marshall, Anne Moody, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, Edwidge Danticat, and Sapphire. My intent is to show the literary genealogy of African-American literature by women to provide a basis for specific recent examples that demonstrate how feminist sensibilities have influenced postmodern subjectivity in the United States.

As Lovalerie King writes in "African American womanism: from Zora Neale Hurston to Alice Walker," Walker responds to Barbara Smith's call for more serious criticism focused on African-American women's art by articulating a particular aesthetic for woman of color she calls "womanism" (King 233). King quotes Madhu Dubey as describing womanism as the process of a black female subject achieving *wholeness*: "Walker's womanist ideology affirms a psychological wholeness that is communally oriented and is explicitly opposed to the self-sufficient individuality of bourgeois humanist ideology" (Dubey 4). King's approach to Walker's womanism, seeing it as predicated on a series of models based on African-American women, and in particular on Zora Neale Hurston's characters, parallels the development of Tambu in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, as described in a previous chapter. This break from "the self-sufficient individuality of bourgeois humanist ideology" that Dubey describes is, to my mind, akin to Gilbert and Gubar's realization of an "anxiety of authorship" as opposed to a male "anxiety of influence," as related in their germinal essay, "The Madwoman in the Attic." While (white, middle class) male artists tend to struggle to distinguish themselves from past artists in a

150

canon packed with people like their selves, female artists (and, I would imagine, even more so

for female artists of color) struggle with being pioneers and strive endlessly to discover

precursors. Beyond discovering precursors and models, the work of developing the African-

American female subject seems to involve first overcoming the negation of agency involved in

male objectification, and lastly, the creation of a public space where women of color come

together, recognize the struggles of others with kindred experiences, and find their own voice in

this new community.

In *Bildungsromane* by women of color post-slave narratives, the most prominent theme

one finds is a critique in that other characters objectify the subjects of these novels both racially

and sexually. In her article, "Black Female Sexuality in *Passing,*" Cheryl A. Wall writes that the

character of the tragic mulatto was the least degrading and most attractive of the images of black

women available in fiction before the Harlem Renaissance (Wall 362). In the last chapter, I

described Jessie Fauset's *Bildungsroman* as a critique of white society as decadent and corrupt,

and her use of the tragic mulatto, a woman who transgresses the so-called "color line," as

evoking the unjustified panic of white audiences at the thought of unintentional miscegenation.[72]

---

[72] The Norton Critical Edition of *Passing* contains excerpts from periodicals of the time such as
"When Is a Caucasian Not a Caucasian?" from *The Independent,* that relates the case of a
newspaper that reported that a young women killed in an automobile accident, hitherto thought
to be white and of a "good family" in New Orleans, was colored. When her brother brought suit
against the newspaper for slander, the editor produced evidence of a black ancestor in the
woman's family tree. One consequence of this was that the German-born husband of the young
woman's sister, having "imbibed the Louisiana prejudice and terror of invisible and infinitesimal
negritude," applied to have the marriage annulled before criminal charges could be brought
against the couple (Kaplan 106).

Before Fauset, Harriet Wilson and Frances Watkins Harper used the tragic mulatto character as a transgressive figure[73] to point out the rabid and cruel exclusivity of white racist culture.

Wall argues that Larsen goes beyond using the tragic mulatto figure as a didactic tool however, by focusing on the ways that her characters struggle for a *wholeness* of identity that they could not find in either the black or the white communities available to them. While Larsen's protagonists transgress racial boundaries and assume racially distinct identities, in Wall's words, these guises "ensure social survival but result in psychological suicide" (Wall 357). Rather than allowing these subjects untroubled movement across racial boundaries, the hybridity of Larsen's subjects instead exposes them to a loss of identity while trapping them in restrictive gender roles.

Wall cites Annis Pratt's analysis of patterns in women's fiction and argues that Larsen's novel subverts normative racial and sexual identities through inconsistencies in its narrative, such as the ambivalent attitude of the main character of *Passing*, Irene Redfield, toward the other mulatto character in the novel, Clare Kendry. Irene seems at once both attracted and repulsed by Clare's materialism and disingenuousness, and Wall notes that Larsen's narration at times treats

---

[73] A substantial body of criticism exists around the question of whether or not Larsen's use of passing can be interpreted as a subversive strategy or whether it recuperates racial and sexual norms. Catherine Rottenberg, in her article "*Passing:* Race, identification, and Desire," seems to agree with Martha Cutter, whom she quotes as claiming that the novel has the potential to disrupt "the enclosures of a unitary identity" and Rottenberg further argues that *Passing* "interrogates and problematizes the ontology of identity categories and their construction" by using scenes from the novel to point out instances of racial performativity (Rottenberg 490). While I am inclined to think of *Passing* as subversive and agree with Rottenberg that Irene "appropriates and internalizes the hegemonic norms of race," I do not fully accept her argument that Clare's development demonstrates how "dominant norms can be misappropriated and how disidentification is always possible" (491). In the novel, Clare may attempt to divest herself of one identity in favor of another, but without the support of someone such as Irene (or a community of people), the attempt is doomed to failure.

Clare like James Weldon Johnson does his main character in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* as an object of satire and at other times as a character worthy of the reader's admiration (Wall 359). Wall also focuses on how Irene Redfield's descriptions of Clare Kendry point out the differences between the two characters, but that Larsen's narration minimizes these differences, as if the two characters, one posing for white and one authentic in her blackness, were really very nearly the same person. If Clare acts as a literary foil for Irene, the psychology of the two characters makes this oppositional relationship plausible. Wall describes a process where Clare becomes the Other to Irene, invading a family that Irene has carefully insulated from contact with racism and sexual desire and threatening to displace Irene in her husband's affections. Irene's attempts to understand Clare become instead an act of objectification, turning Clare into an exotic Other (Wall 360-1):

> Irene invents for Clare a complex inner life. But she is not responding to the person before her so much as to her own notions of Otherness. Clare's "Negro eyes" symbolize the unconsciousness, the unknowable, the erotic, and the passive. In other words, they symbolize those aspects of the psyche Irene denies within herself. Her confused sense of race becomes at last an evasion she uses to confront her deepest feelings (361).

This point is as conceivably far from the kind of empowering community envisioned by Alice Walker's womanist aesthetic, one based on mutual recognition and allowing for a subject's distinct voice, as possible. Wall concludes that, "As these characters deviate from the norm, they are defined- indeed too often define themselves- as Other. They thereby cede control of their lives. But, in truth, the worlds these characters inhabit offer them no possibility of autonomy or fulfillment" (362). Past chapters of this dissertation have made the case that this moment of marginalization, of objectification and Othering, provides the opportunity for the subject to

emerge from the non-identical, from what cannot be accounted for in the split between self and Other, between individual and aggregate.

Larsen's *Passing*, however, demonstrates how that marginalization can perpetuate itself, even among those who are already marginalized both racially and sexually[74]. The ambiguous death of Clare Kendry at the end of Larsen's novel works as a metaphor for the mechanics of self-oppression at work in the novel; does Clare kill herself by jumping to her death, or does Irene, her double, push her from that height? If Zora Neale Hurston's female *Bildungsheld* illuminates a path to freedom, Larsen's tragic characters fail to find their way and become lost.[75] Society does not marginalize women of color in the African-American *Bildungsroman* simply based on their racial and sexual identity however, but by their national identity as well.

Throughout this work, I have tried to stress that the non-identical, the marginalized, subaltern, and formerly unrecognized (by mainstream culture) subject positions in these *Bildungsromane*, can be a space for critiquing the dominant ideology or a place in that new identities can be negotiated. Critic Kevin Meehan, in his article "Caribbean versus United States Racial Categories in Three Caribbean American Coming of Age Stories," illustrates well how

---

[74] The tragic ending of Larsen's story calls attention to the consequences of this internalized marginalization. With the awareness of this cycle comes the hope of dismantling it.

[75] Danzy Senna's coming-of-age novel *Caucasia* picks up many of the issues of mixed racial heritage raised in *Passing*. In an interview with Claudia M. Milian Arias in *Callalo*, Arias mentions that W.E.B. Du Bois identified "the color line" as the greatest challenge during the turn of the century, and she asks Senna what she believes is the greatest challenge of the 21st Century. Senna describes how the gains of the civil rights movement were not evenly distributed among African-Americans of different social class, arguing that the new challenge is the "Literacy Line." While Larsen, in her novels, seems preoccupied with the idea that racial inclusion for those "passing" as white is only superficial, Senna's emphasis on literacy suggests that the next hurdle for building a durable and inclusive community in the new century depends on empowering people by providing them with tools to make their voices heard and giving them a deeper engagement with mainstream American culture (Arias 451-2).

these critiques and negotiations operate. Even though Meehan is looking at these novels in the context of the Caribbean, both Jamaica Kincaid and Paule Marshall's novels feature protagonists who spend a majority of their coming-of-age periods in the United States after being born to immigrant parents or arriving from the Caribbean in her youth. I will use two of his examples here as examples of feminist African-American texts. The first is Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, a semi-autobiographical novel that describes a young woman's flight from the West Indies to work as an au pair in the United States, and the second is Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* that relates the development of a young woman growing up in a Bajan immigrant family in New York. Meehan's purpose is to contrast Caribbean and African American racial ideologies and how they shape and reorganize racial categories, but I borrow his argument to illustrate how the *Bildungsheld* of these two coming-of-age stories approach identification in the context of the differing ideologies he describes.

Meehan makes two points when contrasting Caribbean and North American ideology toward race. First, he argues that the United States historically sees race as a strict binary, abiding by the "one-drop" rule, while West Indian populations tend to see racial differences as graded, and utilizing varied terminology to refer to different degrees of "blackness" (Meehan 261). We have already briefly touched upon the "color line" in the African American *Bildungsroman* and the terror associated with miscegenation in the first half of the twentieth century in the United States. The second point Meehan makes is that both Caribbean and African American scholars tend to see black people in North America, and he quotes Trinidadian journalist and poet Lennox Raphael here, as suffering from an "alleged 'minority neurosis and minority psychosis'" characterized by uncertainty and passivity, in contrast to West Indian blacks who enjoy greater agency due to their majority status in their respective nations (Meehan

155

261). Meehan references a brief scene in *Lucy* that models how West Indian immigrants may

Other African-American blacks to allow themselves to position themselves strategically as

superior in a North American racial hierarchy and discusses the psychology of the protagonist of

Brown Girl, Brownstones to model how a black immigrant subject might reorganize racial

categories to synthesize a Caribbean American identity while straddling both immigrant and

African American communities.

The scene that Meehan describes from *Lucy* is the title character's first encounter with

African-American porters while on a train to the Midwest with her white employer, Mariah:

"The other people sitting down to dinner all looked like Mariah's relatives; the people waiting on

them all looked like mine. The people who looked like my relatives were all old men and very

dignified, as if they were just emerging from a church after Sunday service. On closer

observation, they were not like my relatives; they only looked like them. My relatives always

gave backchat" (Kincaid 32). Meehan argues that after the initial moment of identification with

African Americans, Lucy distances herself from them, contrasting their subservient demeanor

with her more outspoken West Indian family. He also points out that this scene takes place

shortly after a passage where Lucy describes a strong desire to avoid corresponding with her

mother, who still resides back home, and that her denigration of American blacks signals her

desire to identify more closely with her surrogate white mother, Mariah, and with white society

in general (Meehan 262-3). Reminiscent of Clare's tragic search for identification with a genuine

community in *Passing,* Lucy's attempts to become a part of Mariah's family are frustrated, as

she begins to find parallels between the imperfections in her own family and Mariah's, most

notably Mariah's philandering husband, Lewis, who reminds Lucy of her own father's

unfaithfulness to her mother. Even though Lucy strives to escape both her past and her desire for

identification with her au pair family by moving in with a friend and beginning a romantic

relationship, at the end of the novel, Lucy still feels psychologically isolated and unable to forge

an emotional connection with anyone around her. Although much less dramatic than Clare's

plunge out of a window, the inability of Kincaid's Lucy to find a sense of belonging culminates

in a hollow social existence for the protagonist.[76]

The same fate threatens Selena Boyce, the main character of Paule Marshall's *Brown

Girl, Brownstones*. As Meehan argues in his essay, Marshall "goes so far as to suggest that

rejecting African American culture and identity- as many of her Bajan characters do- involves

self-hate that is psychologically costly… [Marshall] also demonstrate[s] the potential for African

American culture to function as a catalyst in Caribbean American identity formation and in the

development of positive racial self-perceptions on the part of Caribbeans in the United States"

(Meehan 259-260). Unlike the protagonist of *Lucy,* who comes to the United States to work

when her mother chooses to pay for her brother's education rather than hers and who has strong,

negative memories of her British-inflected upbringing in the West Indies, Selina has no memory

of Barbados and lives with her mother, father, and sister in New York. As Meehan notes, the

conflict between Selina's mother and father, Silla and Deighton, takes up the first two-thirds of

the book and is central to the character's early development.

Meehan's reading of the conflict is that Selina's mother, Silla, inhabits a Caribbean racial

paradigm while Deighton becomes associated with African-American culture. He notes that

---

[76] The vast majority of these novels end in tragedy. Even when the protagonist survives and emerges from an oppressive environment, such as Kambili in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus,* it is not without great personal cost. Possibly the most optimistic outcome in a novel of African or African-American *Bildung* is Precious in Sapphire's *Push.* Even though she is diagnosed with a terminal disease, *Push* ends with the protagonist surrounded by the nurturing community of her fellow classmates.

Deighton is interested in Louis Armstrong and the blues, and that after suffering an injury working in a factory, he joins a Harlem church led by "Father Peace," a caricature of the 1930's founder of the International Peace Mission movement, Father Divine. Meehan points out that all the accusations Silla levels at Deighton, that he has taken up an attitude of "complete surrender," "humility," and a "wish to suffer" (Marshall 167, 175) are also, in his estimation, "a Caribbean commentary on African American culture and identity" (Meehan 267). While I have issues with Meehan's assessment of what Selina's parents represent to her, since Deighton frequently reminisces about returning home to Barbados while the novel often associates Silla's desire to own and manage property with American capitalism, this tension between Caribbean and African American cultural identities that Meehan sketches sheds a great deal of light on Selina Boyce's development in the novel and is worth exploring further, especially when he considers the character of Miss Thompson, the Boyce's African-American neighbor, as a source of a counter-narrative to the racial stereotypes of American blacks that Meehan implies the Caribbean immigrants of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* share with the dominant white American culture.

The character of Miss Thompson, Meehan explains, is significant for Selina in three ways in the novel (Meehan 268). First, she provides a "more sympathetic and celebratory" view of African American life in Harlem than Selina's experiences of Father Peace's organization, that tears her father away from her and prompts her mother to have him deported. Second, Miss Thompson's story about receiving a wound in her foot while fighting off a rapist during her visit to the American South contrasts with the image Silla paints of Deighton (and, implicitly, American blacks) as gullible, passive, and prone to victimization (Marshall 185). Third, Miss Thompson expresses a positive view of her Bajan neighbors, encouraging Selina to overcome her rejection of her mother in favor of her father and lauding the Bajan benevolent association Selina

despises as "money-changers" (Marshall 186). Selina later decides to take money the Association offers her for school and use it to move away with her boyfriend, but reconsiders after an encounter with the racist mother of a member of her dance troupe, when the white woman makes a careful distinction between the "honest" West Indian girl who once served her family, and like Selina, had "the proper training and education," and African-American blacks (Marshall 249). Shortly afterwards, while riding back on the subway, Selina rejects the false racial dichotomy between her West Indian and African American black identities, psychologically embracing both her mother, the Association, and Miss Thompson, a developmental catharsis that results in a measure of wholeness. While Marshall's character is not politically engaged and does not exhibit a voice to articulate her new found cultural awareness of herself as occupying an intersection between black communities, at least not without the intervention of the novel's future anterior narrator, other contemporary African-American female novelists who are Marshall's contemporaries did explore this new intersectional awareness using the *Bildungsroman* form with a heavy emphasis on the autobiographical.

Like Richard Wright's *Black Boy,* Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is an autobiographical work that describes the maturation of the author as paralleling her growing political awareness. It begins with her teenage years when she hears of Emmett Till's lynching after he whistles at a white woman. Moody tries to find out more information about the lynching and about the NAACP, but the adults in her life instruct her to keep silent about the issue and avoid mentioning either the incident or the organization in front of white people. She finds a teacher who provides her with a more complete picture of race relations in the South, and when Moody leaves to attend first Natchez and then Tougaloo College, she begins organizing protests. As her activism begins to extend beyond the college campus, Moody increasingly runs into white

Southerners willing to go to great lengths to defend segregation and white supremacy. After staging a sit-in at a "whites only" lunch counter in a Woolworth's, Moody and her companions are assaulted by white high school students while police officers stand by and watch. The novel concludes with a description of the assassinations of Medgar Evers and President Kennedy, describing how Moody becomes involved in the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. Published a year after Moody's novel, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is an autobiography of the author's childhood, but it includes the future anterior narrative voice, the narrator's older self-reflecting on her past, that often ironically comments on the suffering of her past self. While Moody's novel focuses on the political awakening of the main character, Angelou's story is framed by her sexual awakening in Southern society, that is both racist and misogynistic. In addition to experiencing frequent discrimination, the protagonist is raped by her mother's boyfriend, withdraws socially, and eventually initiates a sexual encounter with a boy to prove to herself that she is heterosexual, becoming pregnant in the process. The novel ends with the birth of her child, as the protagonist transitions from child to parent. By boldly seizing on to the political and sexual discourses of the time and weaving them into a personal narrative, these *Bildungsromane* feature protagonists who not only have the power to critique the world around them, but the agency to change it. Both novels anticipate the successive generations of strong, politically engaged, and sexually aware, literary black female voices that follow them.

While Moody and Angelou's *Bildungsheld* struggle, as Wright and Ellison's did, with articulating an authentic voice, distinct from and insubordinate to the mainstream leftist ideology of their time, Toni Morrison uses the genre to envision a subject and community of women of color independent of both white neoliberalism and black, male nationalism. A recurring theme in many of her novels is the establishment of a community that creates a space for self-creation and

160

agency in the female black subject. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, hints at the danger to the

development of the individual posed by a suffocating, degrading environment. Gurleen Grewal

describes it as an "anti-*Bildungsromane*" (23), and the novel acts as a *casus belli* for Morrison's

later literary forays. Certainly, Morrison seems to be using the young narrator, Claudia McTeer,

to witness the consequence to the rape victim of Trueblood in *Invisible Man*, by creating a

character named Pecola Breedlove whose last name is reminiscent of Ellison's character.[77] The

tragic ending of *Bluest Eye,* in that Pecola lapses into permanent schizophrenia, is later taken up

by Sapphire in *Push*, as Precious, the victim of incest and rape, not only survives the encounter

but manages to find her own voice. Claudine Raynaud also includes Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

in her list of *Bildungsromane.* Like *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *Song of Solomon* juxtaposes the

perspectives of various characters to show the development of the main character, Macon, as a

network of relationships. His movement from the North to the South in search of his origins in

the town of Shalimar parallels the myth of his great-grandfather, who flew back to Africa. Like

many of Morrison's later novels, it involves a search for a kind of home, a location that will

allow for the creation of something approaching an authentic self, a space that provides agency

by uncovering the subject's position within a family or people.

In his book on Toni Morrison, *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist*

Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness, John N. Duvall separates the author's career into two

distinct phases, one focusing on modernist authenticity and the second focusing primarily on

postmodern constructed blackness. Duvall, who dwells heavily on Morrison's interviews where

she comments on her work, quotes her as saying that her fiction demonstrates her interest in

---

[77] As with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, in that Okonkwo's first wife, Nwoye's mother, remains nameless, the wife and daughter of Trueblood are denied a real presence in *Invisible Man*.

"lawless characters," who "make up their lives, or they find out who they are" (Duvall 8). Her description of her protagonists as "lawless" recalls to my mind the "bad subject" or Misfit that Nancy Armstrong writes about in *How Novels Think*.

I find myself agreeing with Duvall that the overall arc of Morrison's work moves from her *Bildung*-inflected novels trying to find modern authenticity, an essential self, to her novels taking a postmodern turn and attempting to illustrate the subjectivity of her *Bildungsheld* as de-centering and socially-constructed. Duvall uses a term from the title of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, quoting Greenblatt as describing self-fashioning as "the power to impose a shape upon oneself" and as "an aspect of the more general power to control identity" (Duvall 11). Furthermore, Duvall cites two interviews with Morrison, one in 1983 where she denies that her novels are autobiographical, but are rather primarily works of imagination. In contrast, a second example from "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" that Morrison wrote a year later indicates that

> [T]he autobiographical form is classic in Black American or Afro-American literature because it provides an instance in that a writer could be representative, could say, 'My single solitary and individual life is like the lives of the tribe; it differs in these specific ways, but it is a balanced life because it is both solitary and representative (339).

Morrison's overall attitude that some of her significant works are fictional autobiography, or *Bildungsroman*, appears to flip dramatically during this time. I will humbly suggest that this shift occurs in the wake of Alice Walker's publication of *The Color Purple*, a novel that forcefully and compellingly sets forth in fiction the notion of the de-centering, community-

oriented construction of a subject based on Walker's womanist aesthetic, a model of community that Morrison builds upon in her later novels.

In her Preface to *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker relates how beginning an epistolary novel with a letter addressed to God might make readers believe it was a book about encountering what she calls "the Ultimate Ancestor." She describes the novel as relating a journey from the religious to the spiritual, from Celie's faith in connection and confidence in a distant, abstract deity to discovering true and lasting bonds to others in her community. The development of this protagonist centers on her initial status as a silenced victim, a fourteen year-old girl who is sexually exploited by the man she believes to be her father. She learns to resist her domineering husband by following the examples of her daughter-in-law, Sofia, and Shug, her husband's lover, who eventually becomes her most intimate friend. Through her support of those around her and her solidarity with them in the face of racial and sexual violence, Celie becomes empowered actor in her circle of companions. The novel ends with her reunion with her sister and children, from whom she had been separated for almost three decades because her deceased husband kept their letters from Celie.

As Lovalerie King notes, the novel illustrates a distinct black female subject through the development of Celie's "womanist attitude" (King 237). The character finds precursors- women who already exhibit a womanist mindset, like Shug and Sofia- and learns from them. From there, this realization, acceptance, and fostering of Walker's womanist subjectivity spreads to other characters like Mary Alice, Eleanor Jane, Harpo, and even Albert. King describes a series of "components" that inform Walker's womanist aesthetic, and these frame the development of the postmodern black female subject in American literature thus far: self-actualization, that posits a distinctly black feminist subjectivity that anyone may embrace; a sense of self inextricably

bound in a network of relationships that surmounts the classical Western duality that proposes a self opposed to an Other; an embrace of love for all living things, the natural world, and expressions of sexual pleasure; and lastly, the idea that womanism is *distinct* from feminism without being *different* from it (King 247). In both Morrison and Walker's work, however, there is still a sense of their protagonists' development taking place in the shadow of trauma rather than in the midst of it, as they both tend to write historical fiction. Other authors, such as Ntozake Shange, Edwidge Danticat, and Sapphire, focus more on the development of subjects dealing with more personal and immediate trauma in their search for wholeness.

Ntozake Shange uses a polyphonic structure combining the voices of several young women as narrators to tell a coming-of-age story. *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* features the story of three sisters who grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, and come to maturity in different ways, but Geta LeSeur points out that they all achieve autonomy by declaring independence from the men in their lives, and they find empowerment by practicing the crafts taught to them by their mother (LeSeur 135-138). Sassafrass, the oldest, is a poet who travels north to college and then settles in Los Angeles among other artists. She lives with a musician named Mitch who, while paying lip service to the idea that she should pursue her own interests, still expects her to perform "women's work" around the house. After an argument when he physically abuses her, she briefly moves in with her sister Cypress, but returns to Mitch when he apologizes. It's only after she visits The New World Found Collective that she decides she doesn't need him in her life as long as she can express herself through her art. Cypress, the middle sister, works as a dancer, and after years of hedonism, becomes involved with another woman named Idrina. When Idrina leaves her for a former girlfriend, Cypress ends up getting engaged to an old friend named Leroy, choosing a relationship that promises long-term happiness over the passion and turmoil of

her earlier life. Indigo, finally, initially retreats into the world of imaginative play with her dolls and conversing with them helps her relationships around her after her father passes away. When she finally puts her dolls away and becomes more involved in the adult world, her focus continues to be on her fiddle playing rather than romantic relationships. While her sisters struggle to discover a subject position not defined by a sexual relationship of some sort, heterosexual or homosexual, Indigo perceives her sexuality as a supplement to her life and second to her art. The novel links the *Bildung* of each character to that of the others in her family; its contribution is the novel inextricably embeds the kind of reflective subjectivity in a social and historical context.

Another *Bildungsroman* by Shange, *Betsy Brown,* explores the experiences and development of a black middle class girl who moves from a position of privilege to a sense of disempowerment as part of the minority at a majority-white college, where she is forced to reconcile her bourgeois ideals with the reality of American racism. Both of Shange's novels coincide with the emergence of Third-Wave Feminism that, as with Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* in the African chapter, seeks to overturn essentialist notions of feminism that center on the sensibilities of white, middle-class women rather than women of color. As Sandra Hollin Flowers notes in an article about Shange's book *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow Is Enuf,* many critics look at that piece as containing elements of sexual initiation, as in the section entitled "Graduation Night" (Flowers 51). Some critics also see it as relating to a black woman's maturation by providing the perspective of a woman of color within Second-Wave Feminism. By detaching itself from essentialist notions of nation, race, and gender, the *Bildungsromane* of the 1980's and on by woman of color distinguish themselves

from other forms of the *Bildungsroman* that may persist in models that feature a protagonist seeking a modern, authentic identity.

As with Jamaica Kincaid and Paule Marshall, Edwidge Danticatt's roots are in the Caribbean, Haiti specifically, but I will be working with her here as an author in the context of African-American literature and discussing her treatment of subjects as African-Americans who emigrated from abroad. Jana Evans Braziel, in her article "Daffodils, Rhizomes, Migrations: Narrative Coming of Age in the Diasporic Writings of Edwidge Danticat and Jamaica Kincaid," utilizes recurring images of daffodils and other rhizomes within the *Bildungsromane* of these two Caribbean-American authors to demonstrate how these differing models, one that shows an understanding of the rhizome as a "root system that spreads across the ground (as in bamboo) rather than downwards, and grows from several points rather than a single taproot" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 207) that is fundamentally alien and the other that valorizes the adaptability of this kind of life that thrives in non-indigenous climes, are not necessarily oppositional, but are rather interrelated (Braziel 113). Braziel's contrast between Kincaid's *Lucy* and Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, echoes Kevin Meehan's comparison of Kincaid and Marshall earlier in this chapter.

Two things are important to my argument about the *Bildungsroman* when discussing Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. The first is how it reflects, like Marshall, a non-essentialist, postmodern, and intersectional/international approach toward subjectivity in a novel by a woman of color about woman of color. The second is how Danticat utilizes trauma and overcoming trauma, explicitly personal and implicitly historical and collective, as a means of offering coherence to intersectional black identity.

166

In brief, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* features a protagonist named Sophie Caco, a young

woman raised by her aunt in Port-au-Prince until she is twelve years old when she goes to live

with her mother, Martine, in New York City. Once Sophie arrives in New York, her mother

reveals that Sophie is the product of a violent rape while she lived in Haiti. Sophie's presence

reminds Martine of her rape, and Martine insists on reassuring herself of her daughter's virginity

through frequent and humiliating physical "tests" to verify periodically her daughter's virginity,

a form of abuse that eventually prompts Sophie to "fail" the test intentionally by breaking her

hymen, causing her mother to throw her out of the house, and leaving Sophie disgusted with sex

even after she marries. As part of her quest for wholeness, Sophie returns to Haiti with her

newborn daughter, meets her mother there, and the two reconcile. When Martine returns to the

United States and becomes pregnant with a second child, she commits suicide.

Braziel argues that in *Lucy* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, "both girls explore their

identifications and dis-identifications with mother, motherland, and diaspora through daffodils

and other botanical forms" (Braziel 110). She looks at a scene in *Lucy* where Kincaid's

protagonist reflects on daffodils in Wordsworth's poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." Lucy

reflects that the contemplation of the flowers as a moment of joy in the Wordsworth poem when

the poem and the flower are unnatural transplants to her native Antigua seems irrational to her

(Kincaid 124). Braziel suggests that the daffodils in *Lucy* "are (mythically) implicated in history,

as one historical line (a linear, colonial one)" and that "other histories remain submerged in

(post-) colonized landscapes," but then she invokes Édouard Glissant, in *Caribbean Discourse,*

as proposing another vision of the Caribbean through the image of the rhizome:

> The Caribbean's landscape, he explains, 'is not saturated with a single History but
>
> effervescent with intermingled histories, spread around, rushing to fuse without

destroying or reducing each other' (1989, 154). Thus, the Caribbean's histories, according to Glissant, are not those of roots, but of rhizomes: its entangled histories (of colonialism, violence, indigenous genocide, slavery, plantation economies, diaspora, racial and cultural hybridity) are points of rhizomic contact and proliferation- new creations, as Derek Walcott envisions it- *not* the singular and deeply-rooted history of Empire, wholly and intactly transplanted from Europe through conquest, as the colonialist may imagine (Braziel 112).

This vision, throughout her article, Braziel suggests is more in line with Danticat's model of understanding her protagonist's colonial legacies as "flowers of adoption" rather than what Kincaid might describe as "flowers of evil," but she points out that both authors, rather than being irreconcilable, posit views of each character's colonial, racial, and gendered past (and, I would argue, the growth and maturation of these *Bildungsheld's* identities) that denaturalizes the 'natural,' that creates a "rhizomic theory of diaspora," that she describes as *metasporic*, using a term coined by critic and poet Joël des Rosiers, "that marks a continual moving across the borders and boundaries of identity, identification, nationalities, languages, and places of becoming" (Braziel 114). The imagery of the rhizome in post-colonial literature is deeply compelling and worth studying further; in retrospect, Adichie's title for her *Bildungsroman*, *Purple Hibiscus*, evokes the color associated with Walker's womanist aesthetic and another rhizome, and her protagonist's strategy of mediating between Western Christianity and indigenous spirituality is reminiscent of Sophie Caco's own negotiation between Haitian Catholicism and an African spiritual heritage. In contrast, another rhizome appears in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* in the form of the white settler's daughter Bougainvillea, a schoolmate of Tambu. In the case of Dangarembga's novel, the image of the rhizome is used

168

symbolically to show how deeply rooted Western imperialism is in so many aspects of life in Zimbabwe. What then distinguishes the hybrid identity of a colonial settler in Africa or a person of ethnic, class, or gender privilege in the United States from a non-identical subject? I would argue that the identity of the latter coheres around an element of personal or historical trauma. Personal reflection and the (re)construction of a strategic self require a safe space outside of an environment of repression, but once this is achieved, it empowers the subject to assimilate these traumatic experiences.

In her article "Traumatic Realism in the Fiction of Edwidge Danticat," Cherie Meacham borrows the term "traumatic realism" from Dominick La Capra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. She argues that "the fiction of Edwidge Danticat offers a view of trauma as a dominant motif of Haitian experience, a pervasive and prevailing occurrence that defines rather than defies culture and identity" (Meacham 122). She feels that Danticat's vision "contradicts cultural critics who view trauma as an anomaly, an aberration in history, a 'gap or rip' in the cultural fabric that shatters meaning" (ibid). The nature of "traumatic realism" is, Meacham writes, quoting La Capra, that literature that "somehow attempts to come to terms, affectively and cognitively, with limiting experiences involving trauma and its aftereffects" (La Capra 26). Meacham demonstrates how each section of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is shaped by Sophie's experience of trauma, from her departure from Haiti, to her mother's abuse associated with her sexual maturity, to her return to Haiti and her mother's subsequent decline and suicide. She argues that Martine and Sophie provide two different strategies for dealing with trauma and abuse, "acting out" versus "working through" (Meacham 127). While Martine relives her trauma as Sophie matures sexually and perpetuates the cycle of abuse, refusing to undergo therapy because it might involve confronting her pain directly, Sophie attempts to address and mourn her abuse without letting it

169

paralyze her development or dictate her behavior. Meacham describes Sophie as functioning in the narrative as akin to the "middle voice" described by Roland Barthes, performing mediation between "seemingly dichotomous binary opposites" (cited in La Capra 2001, 20). Martine relives her past trauma in her experiences of discrimination in the United States, avoids contact with her native Haiti, and like Kambili's father in *Purple Hibiscus,* her religious mores emphasize sexual purity. In contrast, Sophie draws inspiration from her happy childhood in Haiti, that sustains her in New York; she attends Catholic school in both Haiti and New York, but prizes a statue of Erzulie her grandmother gives her; finally, while Sophie acknowledges the racism of the United States, she also appreciates it as a haven that offers safety "from political violence, extreme poverty, and radically sexist traditions" (Meacham 128). Sophie's "working through" is embodied by her ability to find and use points of commonality between diverse and sometimes conflicting traditions, destabilizing and de-naturalizing oppositional binaries within her national, religious, sexual, and ethnic heritage to create a stronger composite identity that allows her to recuperate from trauma. While Danticat's novel acknowledges that personal and shared trauma necessitates the creation of a durable subjectivity that can negotiate new identities, her *Bildungsroman* does not address the crucial role of education in providing disempowered subjects with this kind of agency. Sapphire's novel *Push* does.

Push addresses issues of abuse and incest reminiscent of Ellison's *Invisible Man,* Morrison's *Bluest Eye*, and Walker's *The Color Purple* in the form of her protagonist, Precious Jones. The crushing poverty and illiteracy that Precious experiences also recall Wright's anti-hero of *Native Son,* Bigger Thomas. Like Bigger, Precious's family members hate and loathe each other, and society's institutions appear to have failed her completely. Despite her advanced age, Precious is unable to read. When she takes assessments in school, the tests paint a picture of

her and her family as having "no brain" (30); like Ellison's narrator, she and her family are

invisible. She has two children by her father, and her mother forces her to conceal the extent of

her abuse. She encounters professionals in both education and healthcare that do not want to

acknowledge her existence due to her profound problems. Things change for Precious when she

is put into a pre-GED class taught by a caring mentor, Miss Rain, and that is attended by a group

of women from diverse backgrounds that have suffered different traumas and can identify with

her. The language of the novel develops over time from a young woman struggling with mastery

of basic literacy and seething with anger to a writer that, as she realizes the extent of her

brutalization with the support of those around her, discovers a poignant and often hopeful voice.

This movement of a subject from victimhood to someone who masters literacy to speak out

about his or her oppression recalls the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs.

The difference is that the people supporting Precious are other women just like her, not patrons

or the privileged. The novel is framed as an autobiographical project for Precious's class, and the

novel ends by including testimonies from some of the other young women in her class that show

the diversity of present-day feminine subjectivity: Rita Romero is a Latina, Rhonda Patrice

Johnson is West Indian, and Jermaine Hicks is a lesbian survivor of rape. The polyphonic quality

of Sapphire's ending is different from that of Morrison or earlier writers; while the perspectives

of a main character's family members in those novels seem to suggest that a home can be found

by digging into the past, the ending of *Push* suggests that the past is something to be overcome,

and that survivors of trauma can create a durable community by sharing their stories with each

other in the present.

While this chapter and earlier ones have attempted to capture how writers in the

Bildungsroman genre have contended with a larger, hegemonic cultural power that marginalizes

their particular subject positions, and perhaps shown how these subject positions have been in turn been used as everything from a stage for political opposition and critique to expressions of postmodern alienation, novels of development like Sapphire's *Push* suggest a new commonality and the possibility of new communities based on shared experiences of oppression or trauma, spaces that allow disadvantaged voices the opportunity to deploy discourses associated class, gender, race, and sexuality in ways that will empower other marginalized subjects. Even though historically marginalized voices now enjoy a greater franchise in popular culture, the problem is not so much that they are subject to reactionary censorship so much as that the authentically transgressive and politically subversive are ignored in favor of the shocking and the sensational. We are left with many of the same questions that divided writers of the Harlem Renaissance like Larsen and Fausset; which voices are "authentic" and which ones are co-opted? Which stories are producing fruitful discussions about the distribution of power in society and which ones are oriented toward exploiting controversy for financial profit? Is it possible to make such distinctions? Is it a debate worth having?

Grappling with these questions, distinguishing between sincerity and posture, genuine inclusion and cynical exploitation, can be an extremely painful process. For my part, I still retain great confidence that literature can provide readers with comfort and support as they wrestle with these questions. The stories of the *Bildungsheld* created by artists like Larsen and Angelou, Morrison and Sapphire provide us with material for refining our understanding of others and for building a better awareness of, and a better community where we may find, our selves.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have attempted to sketch a broad outline of how subject formation has been represented in Anglophone literature since the end of the nineteenth century. In the introduction, I discussed how the *Bildungsroman* genre, while stemming from a German literary tradition, has taken root all over the world, and how it provides a convenient umbrella for examining and evaluating the shifting attitude toward subject formation in a set of Anglophone novels in the Atlantic region that are characterized more by a sensibility and preoccupation with self-fashioning rather than a specific set of genre criteria. I considered recent critical literary theory surrounding the topic of subjectivity and how this theory was shaped by philosophical inquiries into the nature of the self and the Other since the Enlightenment, and I emphasized contemporary debates regarding the agency of the subject in the process of self-construction. I drew an implicit parallel between the philosophical difficulties of defining the limits of the self and the nebulous status of the *Bildungsroman* as a useful genre category in literary criticism, suggesting that the flexibility of the genre allows for experimentation in literary self-representation. I offered a number of critical methodologies that have been used to explicate representations of subject formation.

In subsequent chapters, I described a shift in how subject formation has been rendered in the *Bildungsroman* in British, African, and African-American literature. It starts in the struggle of marginalized subjects to resist objectification and generate a counter-discourse to heteronormative, gendered, racist, and imperialist ideologies. It deploys a subject position of

modernist oppositional tension that perpetuates binaries of self and Other. Finally, it expresses itself as a de-centering, socially constructed, and intersectional postmodern subjectivity.

Upon choosing the post-colonial *Bildungsroman* as the topic for my dissertation, my initial thought was that I would discuss how the genre functioned as a means of performing the nation, and the planned scope of the dissertation was originally much, much broader. As I began to narrow my focus, however, it became impossible to ignore the postmodern turn in many of the coming-of-age novels I read, particularly those informed by Third-Wave Feminism. In the dissertation, I note that a number of literary critics understand the *Bildungsroman* as terminating at a particular juncture or indicate that it is hopelessly entangled with other, related fictional and non-fictional genres, such as autobiography. Rather than seeing the genre as bound to a particular chronological period, region, or process, I began to see the *Bildungsroman* as addressing a set of concerns particular to different groups over a little more than a century of Anglophone literature. Each of these groups was silenced, objectified, or Othered at some point. Each responded by staking out a new subject position to analyze those discourses leveled at them and to engender a community where these subjects could identify with each other. Over time, subject formation became less about racial, sexual, or national categorical identification, and more about contingent, limited identification based on the intersection of points of commonality. In other words, the *Bildungsheld* of these novels found that identification and community could be built on finding common connections with others, and at the dawn of the Twenty-First Century, these stories increasingly indicate that the keys to self-formation are empathy and relation.

Furthermore, the experience and creation of art fosters empathy and promotes these meaningful connections. Modernist literary debates over authenticity and inclusion into a particular body of literature can and should give way to a greater tolerance for literary and

critical diversity. The literature of a particular nation was never the sole possession of that nation, but has always been the province of any reader with the tools to create meaning from the written word. The concern of literary scholars in the new millennium should no longer be who is and who is not allowed to speak, but who has access to the relevant hermeneutic resources to create meaning from the glut of sensory overload that is Anglophone culture and how to best assist them in crafting a "resonant voice" to help them fully engage in public discourse.

In the United States, at a time when various and sundry identity politics are ideologically dominant, information is widely accessible but indistinguishable from the exercise of powerful private interests, and the public questions the purpose and worth of the humanities, it is important to illustrate how the literary worlds we fashion and study provide not just a retreat from the harshness and brutality we see on the news, in social media, and in our popular entertainment, but also a blueprint for refashioning ourselves into people who can better understand, appreciate, and serve one another. Critical research into the means that subjects use to negotiate their own identities is relevant to Anglophone readers in a number of ways. In an increasingly global economy in which careers, once synonymous with identity for vast numbers of people, are disappearing and are being replaced with temporary or on-demand labor, it is vital to rethink how we think about work and identity in order to foster a healthy sense of self. It is crucial for people to think critically about the ways that political and commercial discourse targets audience based on how they identify themselves and reify harmful stereotypes and attitudes toward body image. In a society that is becoming more diverse in its understanding of sexuality and gender, it is imperative that our compassion for those affected by societal change keep pace with our acknowledgement of these changes. For a world populace whose social interactions are increasingly mediated through electronic correspondence and social media, it is

vital that we evaluate the impact of information technology on our intellectual and social maturation.

Over the last few decades, groundbreaking work has been done in gender scholarship, queer theory, and cultural studies, but these pursuits should be central to all literary criticism and critical observation should be separated, at least on an emotional level, from partisanship. The personal is political, but the political does not always have to be personal.

The best route to giving this body of literature the full attention it deserves while avoiding a facile and reductionist understanding of how it should be "best" understood is to allow diversity and inclusivity into the critical discussion of literature without privileging any voice over the others. There are always those who try to dominate discussions by talking the loudest, by shouting down the opposition, and by excluding and alienating those on the sidelines. The surest antidote to this kind of angry discourse, I find, is to keep a calm, even tone, invite others to speak, and acknowledge that we can learn something valuable from every new voice that joins the conversation. Sometimes, this is best accomplished by steering the discussion of literature away from politics and back on to literature for its own sake.

This approach has three major benefits. My immediate concerns are pedagogical, so forgive me if my emphasis focuses exclusively on the *Bildungsroman*'s reception by freshman college students. The first benefit of this approach is it allows critics and teachers to shift discussions that may devolve into partisan identity politics back into a discussion of form. I confess that there is a delicious irony in putting modern formalism to such postmodern ends as de-naturalizing and de-essentializing a critical discussion of race or gender in a text. In a classroom setting, this de-escalates what may become heated discussions touching upon

subjectivity, trauma, and identity politics. Second, shifting the discussion of gender and/or race in literature to formalist considerations has the advantage of forcing beginning critics to engage with texts as an intellectual exercise rather than an emotional experience, allowing them a greater amount of critical distance from what may be painful or shameful topics. Third, by allowing students to consider the subject formation of a *Bildungsheld* from a critical perspective, this approach may encourage students to think critically about how they have fashioned their own identities and prompt them to find more points of commonality with others. I normally start each course with a short autoethnography that prompts students to think about how their accustomed subject position informs both their reader and their writing on various and sundry topics.

I have listened to both graduate students and tenured faculty say that they simply do not read or discuss literatures that they do not personally identify with because they do not wish to be drawn into acrimonious and futile debates over who should be interpreting and speaking about these works. While this is understandable because few worthy interlocutors and few productive intellectual discussions thrive in a hostile and toxic cultural environment, it is a shame that so many cede this ground as a hopelessly entrenched battleground when, as a field of literary scholarship, it is one of the most fertile areas of study that I have encountered.

WORKS CITED

Achebe, Chinua. *The Education of a British-Protected Child*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

    Print.

---. *Home and Exile*. New York: Anchor Books, 2001. Print.

---. *There Was a Country*. New York: Penguin, 2012. Print.

---. *Hopes and Impediments*. New York: Doubleday, 1989. Print.

---. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994. Print.

---. "Uncle Ben's Choice." *Girls at War and Other Stories*. New York: Anchor Books, 1991. 75-

    81. Print.

---. *No Longer at Ease*. New York: I. Obolensky, 1961. Print.

---. *A Man of the People: A Novel*. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1967. Print.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Purple Hibiscus : A Novel*. 1st ed. ed. Chapel Hill, N.C:

    Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2003. Print.

Adorno, Theodor W., and Inc NetLibrary. *Negative Dialectics*. London: Routledge & Kegan

    Paul, 1973. Print.

Amoko, Apollo. "Autobiography and *Bildungsroman* in African Literature." *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Ed. Abiola Irele. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print.

Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities. [Electronic Resource]: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. n.p.: London; New York: Verso, c2006. 2006. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Andrade, Heather Russell. "Revising Critical Judgments of 'The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man." *African American Review* 40:2 (summer, 2006): 257-270. Web.

Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*. n.p.: New York: Random House, 2002. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Armstrong, Nancy. *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. Print.

Ashcroft, Bill, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths. *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013. *Discovery eBooks*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Bakhtin, M.M. "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)." *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. Print.

Baldick, Chris. *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. Print.

Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. New York, N.Y: Dell Pub, 1985. Print.

Beavers, Herman. "Finding Common Ground: Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin." *The*
Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel. 189-202. Cambridge, England:
Cambridge UP, 2004. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Beckson, Karl, ed. *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970. Print.

Behn, Aphra, and Janet Todd. *Oroonoko*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.

Bhabha, Homi. "The World and the Home." *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 141-153.

Boehmer, Elleke. *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*.
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005. Internet resource.

Boes, Tobias. "Modernist Studies and the Bildungsroman: A Historical Survey of Critical
Trends." *Literature Compass* 3.2 (2006): 230. Print.

Brantlinger, Patrick, William B. Thesing, and Wiley InterScience (Online service). *A Companion*
to the Victorian Novel. Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2005. Print.

Braziel, Jana Evans. "Daffodils, Rhizomes, Migrations: Narrative Coming Of Age in the
Diasporic Writings of Edwidge Danticat and Jamaica Kincaid." *Meridians: Feminism, Race,*
Transnationalism 2 (2003): 110. *Project MUSE*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Bristow, Joseph, ed. *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend*. Athens, OH:
Ohio University Press, 2008. Print.

Brown, Lloyd W. "Cultural Norms and Modes of Perception in Achebe's Fiction." *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*. Eds. Catherine L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors. Washington: Three Continents Press, 1978. Print.

Brown, William Wells, Ezra Greenspan, and William Wells Brown. *Clotel & Other Writings*. n.p.: New York, N.Y.: Library of America, 2014. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. n.p.: New York: Routledge, 1999. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Camus, Albert. *A Happy Death*, trans. Richard Howard. New York: Knopf, 1972. Print.

Carby, Hazel V. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. n.p.: New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Carroll, David. *Chinua Achebe*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980. Print.

Castle, Gregory. *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006. Print.

Childs, Peter. *Modernism*. n.p.: London; New York: Routledge, 2000. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Chiwome, Emmanuel. "Communication with Children on Sexual Issues." *Introduction to Shona Culture*. Harare: Juta Zimbabwe, 1996. 51-64.

Clausson, Nils. ""Culture and Corruption": Paterian Self-Development Versus Gothic

    Degeneration in Oscar Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray"." *Papers on Language &*

    Literature 39.4 (2003): 339-364. *Art Full Text (H.W. Wilson).* Web. 26 July 2013.

Cohen, Ed. "Writing Gone Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation." *Oscar*

    Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Jonathan Freedman. Upper Saddle River, NJ:

    Prentice Hall, 1998. 158-177. Print.

Craft, Christopher. "Come See about Me: Enchantment of the Double in *the Picture of Dorian*

    Gray." *Representations* 91.1 (2005): 109-136. Web. 5 Aug 2013.

Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *The Book of Not: A Novel*. Banbury: Ayebia Clarke, 2006. Print.

---. *Nervous Conditions*. Banbury: Ayebia Clarke, 2004. Print.

Danson, Lawrence. "Oscar Wilde, W.H., and the Unspoken Name of Love." *Oscar Wilde: A*

    Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Jonathan Freedman. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice

    Hall, 1998. 81-98. Print.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. n.p.: New York: Vintage Books, c1994.

    1998. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Davies, Tony. *Humanism*. London; New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

Dawson, Graham. *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of*

    Masculinities. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

DeLaura, David J. "Heroic Egotism: Goethe and the Fortunes of *Bildung* in Victorian England."

    In *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Continuing Vitality,* ed.

    Ulrich Goebel and Wolodymyr T. Zyla. Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1984. Print. 41-60.

Deleuze, Gilles, Brian Massumi, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and*

    Schizophrenia. London: Continuum, 1988. Print.

Dellamora, Richard. *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism.* Chapel

    Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1990. Print.

Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. n.p.: New York: Riverhead Books,

    2007. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. New York, NY: Open Road Media, 2015. *Discovery*

    eBooks. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Dijkstra, Bram. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture.* New

    York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.

Dollimore, Jonathan. *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault.* New York:

    Oxford University Press, 1991. Print.

---, "Different Desires: Subjectivity and Transgression in Wilde and Gide." *Oscar Wilde: A*

    Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Jonathan Freedman. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice

    Hall, 1998. 36-54. Print.

Dowling, Linda C. *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin De Siècle*. Princeton, N.J:

> Princeton University Press, 1986. Print.

Dubey, Madhu. *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*. n.p.: Indiana Univ. Press,

> 1994. *Bibliotheksverbund Bayern*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Dubois, W.E.B., Author, and Mirron, Reader Willis. *DUBOIS, W.E.B.: Souls of Black Folk (The)*

> *(Unabridged)*. n.p.: Blackstone Audio, n.d. *Naxos Spoken Word Library*. Web. 24 Aug.

> 2016.

Duvall, John N. (John Noel). *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity*

> *and Postmodern Blackness*. 1st Ed. New York: Palgrave, 2000. Print.

Edgar, Andrew, and Peter R. Sedgwick. *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory*. London; New York:

> Routledge, 1999. Print.

Elbow, Peter. *Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward A Hopeful Theory Of Writing And Teaching*

> *Writing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. *Discovery eBooks*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. Random House, Inc., 2002 Ed. New York: Random House, 2002.

> Print.

---. "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" and "Richard Wright's Blues." *Shadow and Act*. n.p.:

> New York, Random House, 1964. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24

> Aug. 2016.

Ellmann, Richard, ed. *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ:

    Prentice-Hall, 1969. Print.

---, "The Critic as Artist as Wilde." *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Ed. Jonathan

    Freedman. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998. 22-35. Print.

---, *Oscar Wilde.* New York: Vintage Books, 1988. Print.

Emecheta, Buchi. *The Joys of Motherhood: A Novel*. 1st ed. Ed. New York: G. Braziller, 1979.

    Print.

Equiano, Olaudah, and Robert J. Allison. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah

    Equiano*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Etsy, Jed. *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*.

    Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.

Fabi, M. Giulia. "Reconstructing the Race: The Novel after Slavery." *The Cambridge

    Companion to the African American Novel*. 34-49. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP,

    2004. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991. Print.

---. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008. Print.

Fasan, Rotimi Omoyele. "Mapping Nigerian Literature." *African Nebula* 1:1 (2010): 34-43.

Fauset, Jessie Redmon. *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral*. n.p.: London; Boston: Pandora

    Press, 1985. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Flowers, Sandra Hollin. "Colored Girls: Textbook for the Eighties." *Black American Literature Forum* 15.2 (1981): 51-54. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Freedman, Jonathan, ed. Introduction. *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998. 1-9. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. John Rickman, Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1957. Print.

Friedman, Lawrence M. (Lawrence Meir). *The Horizontal Society*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1999. Print.

Froude, James A. *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy: Or an Irish Romance of the Last Century*. London: Longmans, Green, 1889. Print.

Frow, John. *Genre*. London; New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Gagnier, Regenia. *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. Print.

Gates Jr., Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. *Discovery eBooks*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Gay, John. *The Beggar's Opera Written by Mr. Gay*. A new edition. Ed. London: printed by T. Sabine, No. 81, Shoe-Lane, 1790. Print.

Gelfand, Michael. *Growing Up in Shona Society*. Harare: Mambo, 1979.

George, Rosemary, and Helen Scott. "An Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga." *Novel* 26:3 (1993): 309-319.

Gibson, Michael. *Symbolism.* Los Angeles: Taschen, 2003. Print.

Gikandi, Simon. *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. Print.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. *Discovery eBooks*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. n.p.: Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993. 1993. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Glissant, Édouard, and J. Michael Dash. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. n.p.: Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1989. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels*. Trans. Thomas Carlyle (1885): *HathiTrust.* Web. 23 Aug. 2016.

Golding, Johnny. "CFAR-BCU Media Arts Philosophy Practice (Prof Johnny Golding) Week 11." Online Video Clip. *YouTube.* 5 Dec 2013. Web. 11 October 2016.

Gower, John, Eric W. Stockton, and Eric W. ed. and tr. Stockton. *The Major Latin Works of*
    John Gower: The Voice of One Crying, and the Tripartite Chronicle. Seattle: University
    of Washington Press, 1962. Print.

Graham, Maryemma. "Introduction." *Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel.*
    [Electronic Resource]. n.p.: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. *University of*
    South Florida Libraries Catalog. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. n.p.: Chicago:
    University of Chicago Press, 1980. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web.
    24 Aug. 2016.

Grewal, Gurleen. *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1998.
    Print.

Habila, Helen. "In Time of War." *The Guardian*. 4 November 2006. Web. 24 Aug 2016.

Hall, Donald E. (Donald Eugene). *Subjectivity*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Hall, Stuart. "Minimal Selves." *Identity: the Real Me (ICA Documents 6)*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha.
    London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1988. 44-46. *Instructional Computing Services at*
    University of California, Santa Cruz. Web. 21 August 2014.

Hammond, Dorothy and Alba Jablow. *The Africa That Never Was: Four Centuries of British*
    Writing about Africa. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1992.

Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. New York: Harper, 1905. Print.

---. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. New York: Knopf, 1991. Print.

Harriet A., Jacobs, and Brent Linda. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Dinslaken: anboco,

    2016. *Discovery eBooks*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Haslam, Richard. "The Hermeneutic Hazards of Hibernicizing Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of*

    Dorian Gray." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*. 57.1 (2014): 37-58. Web. 8

    Oct. 2014.

Heath, Kay. "In the Eye of the Beholder: Victorian Age Construction and the Specular Self."

    Victorian Literature and Culture 34.1 (2006): 27-45. Web. 5 Aug 2013.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, et al. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford, Eng: Clarendon Press,

    1977. Print.

Henderson, George Wylie. *Ollie Miss; a Novel*. n.p.: Chatham, N. J., Chatham Bookseller

    1973. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Hewett, Heather. "Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the Voice of the Third

    Generation." *English in Africa* 32:1 (2005): 73-97.

hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge,

    2015. *Discovery eBooks*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

--. *Talking Back*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1989. Print.

Hughes, Langston. *Not Without Laughter*. n.p.: New York, London, A. A. Knopf, 1930,

    1971. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. 1st Perennial Library ed. Rita Dove, Ed.

New York, N.Y: Perennial Library, 1990. Print.

---, *Their Eyes were Watching God*. Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1965. Print.

Huysmans, J.-K, Havelock Ellis, and Arthur Zaidenberg. *Against the Grain: <a Rebours>*. New

York: Illustrated Editions Co, 1931. Print.

Innes, Catherine L. "Language, Poetry and Doctrine in *Things Fall Apart." Critical Perspectives

on Chinua Achebe*. Eds. Catherine L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors. Washington: Three

Continents Press, 1978. Print.

---. "Rewriting Her Story: Nation and Gender." *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial

Literatures in English*. Ed. C.L. Innes. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Print.

James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*.

n.p.: New York, NY: Vintage Books, c1963, 1989. *University of South Florida Libraries

Catalog*. Web. 24 August 2016.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act.* Ithaca:

Cornell UP, 1981. Print.

---. "Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65-88.

Web. 13 October 2016.

Johnson, James Weldon, James Weldon Selections 2004 Johnson, and of America Library.

    Writings. New York: Library of America: Distributed to the trade in the United States by

    Penguin Putnam, 2004. Print.

---. *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. [Lanham, Md.]: Start Publishing LLC,

    2012. *Discovery eBooks*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Joyce, James. "Oscar Wilde: The Poet of *Salome*." Ellmann, Richard, ed. *Oscar Wilde: A*

    Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969. 56-60. Print.

---. *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*. New York: Viking Press, 1964. Print.

Kant, Immanuel, and Thomas Kingsmill translator Abbott. *Fundamental Principles of the*

    Metaphysics of Morals. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co, 1949. Print.

Kavanagh, James. "Ideology." *Critical Terms for Literary Study.* Eds. Frank Lentricchia and

    Thomas McLaughlin. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Print.

Keyser, Catherine. "Jane Eyre, Bondwoman: Hannah Crafts' Rethinking of Charlotte Bronte." *In*

    Search of Hannah Crafts: Critical Essays on the Bondwoman's Narrative, eds. Henry

    Louis Gates Jr. and Hollis Robbins (New York: Basic Books, 2004): 87-105.

Kincaid, Jamaica. *Lucy*. n.p.: New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2002. *University of South Florida*

    Libraries Catalog. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

King, Lovalerie. "African American Womanism: From Zora Neale Hurston to Alice

    Walker." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*. 233-252.

Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 2004. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 24

  Aug. 2016.

Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits à Selection*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. n.p.: Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

  University Press, 2001. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug.

  2016.

Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997. Print.

--- And Thadious M. Davis. *Quicksand*. n.p.: New York: Penguin Books, 2002. *University of*

  South Florida Libraries Catalog. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

LeSeur, Geta J. *Ten is the Age of Darkness: The Black Bildungsroman*. Columbia: University of

  Missouri Press, 1995. Print.

Lewin, Albert, George Sanders, Hurd Hatfield, Donna Reed, Angela Lansbury, Peter Lawford,

  and Oscar Wilde. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York: MGM/UA Home Video, 1985.

Liebman, Sheldon W. "Character Design in *the Picture of Dorian Gray*." *Studies in the Novel*

  31.3 (1999): 296-316. Web. 10 June 2013.

Locke, John. *An Abridgment of Mr. Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. A new

  edition, with additions carefully revised and corrected. Ed. London: Printed for & sold by

  J. Nicholson, Cambridge, 1782. Print.

Machiavelli, Niccolo, Ebooks Corporation, and David Wootton. *The Prince*. Indianapolis:

Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2009. Print.

Malchow, Howard L. *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Stanford, Calif:

Stanford University Press, 1996. Print.

Manganiello, Dominic. "Ethics and Aesthetics in 'The Picture of Dorian Gray.'" *The Canadian*

Journal of Irish Studies 9.2 (1983): 25-33. Web. 10 June 2013.

Marshall, Paule. *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. n.p.: Chatham, N. J., Chatham Bookseller [c1959],

1959. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Marx, Karl. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. New York: International

Publishers, 1970. Print.

---. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. New York: International Publishers, 1964.

Print.

Maynard, John R. "The Bildungsroman." *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Eds. Patrick

Brantlinger and William B. Thesing. Malden, Mass: John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 2002. *EBook*

Collection (EBSCOhost). Web. 23 Aug. 2016.

McCormack, Jerusha H. *Wilde the Irishman*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. Print.

McKeon, Michael. *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins

University Press, 2000. Print.

McLaren, Joseph. "Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Moving the Centre* and Its Relevance to

    Afrocentricity." *Journal of Black Studies* 28:3 (1998): 386-397.

Meacham, Cherie. "Traumatic Realism in the Fiction of Edwidge Danticat." *Journal of Haitian*

    Studies 2005: 122. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Meehan, Kevin. "Caribbean versus United States Racial Categories in Three Caribbean

    American Coming of Age Stories." *Narrative* 1999: 259. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 24 Aug.

    2016.

Middleton, Peter. *The Inward Gaze: Masculinity & Subjectivity in Modern Culture*. New York:

    Routledge, 1992. Print.

Milian Arias, Claudia M. "An Interview with Danzy Senna." *Callaloo* 2 (2002): 447. *Academic*

    OneFile. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Monsman, Gerald. "The Platonic Eros of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde: 'Love's Reflected

    Image' in the 1890s." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920 45.1* (2002): 26-45. Web.

    7 Oct. 2014.

Moody, Anne. *Coming Of Age in Mississippi*. n.p.: New York: Dell, c1968. 1976. *University of*

    South Florida Libraries Catalog. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. Trans. Albert

    Sbragia. n.p.: London; New York: Verso, 2000. Print.

---. *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*. London: Verso, 1998. Print.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. 1st Pocket bks. print. Ed. New York, N.Y: Washington Square

>Press, publ. by Pocket Books, 1972. Print.

---. *Jazz*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 2006. Print.

---. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Knopf, 2006. Print.

Mulvey, Christopher. "Freeing the Voice, Creating the Self: The Novel and Slavery." *The*

>*Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*. 17-33. Cambridge, England:

>Cambridge UP, 2004. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Naipaul, V S. *A Bend in the River*. New York: Knopf, 1979. Print.

Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1983. Print.

Newell, Stephanie. "Remember J.M. Stuart-Young of Onitsha, Colonial Nigeria: Memoirs,

>Obituaries, and Names. *"Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 73.4 (2003):

>505-530. Web. 23 Aug 2016.

Novak, Daniel A. "Sexuality in the Age of Technological Reproducibility." *Oscar Wilde and*

>*Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend.* Ed. Joseph Bristow. Athens, OH: Ohio

>University Press, 2008. 63-95. Print.

Nunokawa, Jeff. "Oscar Wilde in Japan: Aestheticism, Orientalism and the Derealization of the

>Homosexual." *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Ed. Jonathan Freedman. Upper

>Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998. 149-157. Print.

Pater, Walter. *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. Ed. Matthew Beaumont. New York:

Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.

---, and Gerald Monsman. *Gaston de Latour: The Revised Text / Walter Pater; With*

Introduction, Explanatory Annotation & Apparatus Criticus. Edited by Gerald Monsman.

n.p.: Greensboro, N.C.: ELT Press, 1995. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*.

Web. 7 Oct. 2014.

---. *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*. New York: Cosimo, 2005. Print.

Peters, John G. "Style and Art in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Form as Content."

Victorian Review 25.1 (1999): 1-13. Web. 10 June 2013.

Pratt, Annis. *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*. n.p.: Bloomington: Indiana University

Press, c 1981. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Radcliffe, Ann W. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. London: Dent, 1962. Print.

Raynaud, Claudine. "Coming Of Age in the African American Novel." *The Cambridge*

Companion to the African American Novel. 106-121. Cambridge, England: Cambridge

UP, 2004. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Reed, Jeremy. Introduction. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. [London]: Creation Books, 2000. 5-14.

Print.

Richardson, Samuel, and C S. Lewis. *Clarissa*. , 1932. Print.

Roditi, Edouard. "Fiction as Allegory: *The Picture of Dorian Gray."* Ed. Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969. 47-55. Print.

Rottenberg, Catherine. "Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire." *Criticism* 4 (2003): 435. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Rousseau, Jean Jacques, and William Boyd. *Emile: Selections*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1971. Print.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. Print.

---. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993. Print.

Sapphire. *Push: A Novel*. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2009. Print.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness,* trans. Hazel Barnes, New York: Washington Square Press, 1992. Print.

Satzinger, Christa. *The French Influences on Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray and Salome.* New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994. Print.

Schreiner, Olive. *The Story of an African Farm: A Novel*. New York: A.L. Burt, 1890. Print.

Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. n.p.: Durham: Duke University Press, c2004. 2004. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Seacole, Mary. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*. London: Penguin

    Classics, 2005. Print.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire.* New

    York: Columbia University Press, 1985. Print.

Septo, Robert. *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*. Champaign:

    University of Illinois Press, 1991. Print.

Shange, Ntozake. *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo: A Novel*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2010.

    Print.

---. *Betsy Brown: A Novel*. n.p.: New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985. *University of South Florida*

    Libraries Catalog. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

---. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide, When The Rainbow Is Enuf: A*

    Choreopoem 1St Scribner Poetry Ed. n.p.: Scribner Poetry, 1997. *Public Library Core*

    Collection: Nonfiction (H.W. Wilson). Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Shaw, Carolyn Martin. "You Had a Daughter, but I Am Becoming a Woman": Sexuality,

    Feminism and Postcoloniality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's "Nervous Conditions" and "She

    No Longer Weeps." *Research in African Literatures* 38:4 (2007): 7-27.

Shinn, Christopher A. "Masquerade, Magic, and Carnival in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible*

    Man." *African American Review* 2 (2002): 243. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 24

    Aug. 2016.

Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle.* New York: Viking

>   Penguin, 1990. Print.

Singer, Peter. *Hegel*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983. Print.

Sloan, John *Authors in Context: Oscar Wilde.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial*

>   *Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia

>   University Press, 1994. Print.

--. *The Spivak Reader.* Eds. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean. New York: Routledge, 1995.

>   Print.

Stepto, Richard. *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative.* Chicago:

>   University of Illinois Press, 1991. Print.

Stevenson, Robert L, and Roger Luckhurst. *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Other*

>   *Tales*. Oxford [England: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1992. Print.

Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. New York: Dell Pub. Co, 1961. Print.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, Mass:

>   Harvard University Press, 1989. Print.

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ Wa. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics and Language of African Literature.* Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2008.

---. *Weep Not, Child.* Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1987.

---. *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. London: J. Currey, 1992. Print.

Thomas, J J. *Froudacity: West Indian Fables*. London: New Beacon, 1969. Print.

Threadgold, Terry. "Talking about Genre: Ideologies and Incompatible Discourses." *Cultural Studies* 3.1 (1989): 101-27. Print.

Trimmer, Joseph F. "The Grandfather's Riddle in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man." *Black American Literature Forum* 1978: 46. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. n.p.: Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Van Allen, Judith. "Aba Riots or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women." *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change.* Ed. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford UP, 1976. 59-86.

Van Vechten, Carl. *Nigger Heaven / By Carl Van Vechten; Introduction by Kathleen Pfeiffer*. n.p.: Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000. *Harvard Library Bibliographic Dataset*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Waldrep, Shelton. *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie*. Minneapolis:

    University of Minnesota Press, 2004. Print.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1983. Print.

Wall, Cheryl A. *Passing: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds And Contexts, Criticism /* Nella

    Larsen; Edited By Carla Kaplan. n.p.: New York: W.W. Norton & Co., c2007.

    2007. *Harvard Library Bibliographic Dataset*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Wamalwa, D. Salituma. "The Engaged Artist: The Social Vision of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o." *Africa*

    Today 33:1 (1986): 9-18.

White, Hayden V. *Metahistory. [Electronic Resource]: The Historical Imagination in*

    Nineteenth-Century Europe. n.p.: Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,

    1973. *University of South Florida Libraries Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ed. Norman Page. New York, Broadview, 2005.

    Print.

---, *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. Intro. Vyvyan Holland. China: Imago/Collins, 2001. Print.

Wilner, Eleanor R. "The Invisible Black Thread: Identity and Non-Identity in *Invisible Man."*

    Eds. Sanders, Archie D., and et al. "(Special Issue: Ralph Ellison.)." *College Language*

    Association Journal 13.3 (1970): *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Wilson, Harriet E., and R. J. Ellis. *Our Nig, Or, Sketches From The Life Of A Free Black, In A*

    Two-Story White House, North, Showing That Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There / By

    "Our Nig", Harriet E. Wilson ; Edited, With An Introduction And Notes, By R.J. Ellis.

n.p.: Nottingham: Trent Editions, 1998. *Harvard Library Bibliographic Dataset*. Web. 24
Aug. 2016.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and
Moral Subjects by Mary Wollstonecraft. Vol. I.* The second edition. Ed. London: Printed
for J. Johnson, No 72, St. Paul's Church Yard, 1792. Print.

Woodward, Kathleen. "Instant Repulsion: Decrepitude, the Mirror Stage, and The Literary
Imagination." *Kenyon Review* 5.4 (Fall 1983): 43-66. Web. 11 Oct 2016.

Wright, Derek. "Regurgitating Colonialism: The Feminist Voice in Tsitsi Dangarembga's
Nervous Conditions." *New Directions in African Fiction,* London: Twayne, 1997. 102-
22.

Wright, Richard. *Black Boy, a Record of Childhood and Youth.* n.p.: New York, London, Harper
& brothers [1945], 1945. University of South Florida Libraries Catalog. Web. 24 Aug.
2016.

---. *Native Son*. n.p.: New York: Perennial, 2003. 2003. *University of South Florida Libraries
Catalog*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.

Yack, Bernard. *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent
from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*. Princeton: Princeton Univ Pr, 1986. *ATLA
Religion Database with ATLASerials*. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.