

Island Relations, Continental Visions and Graphic Networks

By Jak Peake

In February 1926, W. E. B. Du Bois published a questionnaire in the *Crisis*, the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) journal of which he was editor, on the nature of black representation in the arts. The responses were published in the magazine as part of a long-running symposium that is remembered today as a major Harlem Renaissance event. What is not remembered, however, is the Caribbean backstory to the symposium. The aim of this essay is to relate how controversy over Knopf's 1925 reprint of Haldane Macfall's now little-known novel, *The Wooings of Jezebel Pettyfer*, contributed to Du Bois's symposium, and how the Caribbean roots of the novel and forum were written out of the picture. The discussion here homes in on a few key concerns and moments: the controversies and absences in Alain Locke's richly illustrated 1925 publications; Eric Walrond's collaboration with Mexican illustrator Miguel Covarrubias in *Vanity Fair* and his writing over the 1924-26 period more broadly; the promotion of Macfall's novel by Carl Van Vechten, perhaps the most prominent white connoisseur of the black arts in the US and reactions to his assessment in the black press; the concerns reflected in New Negro discourse about dialect, as well as images, which invoked black minstrelsy. In charting this terrain, particular consideration is given to the "inter-artistic" relations between text and image, or a variety of mixed media in New Negro publications which has proved a rich seam for Harlem Renaissance studies in recent decades.¹

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the growth in image-laden, mixed-media periodicals was phenomenal. The US magazine revolution of the 1890s saw the price of periodicals lowered, their mass production made easier and an improvement in the techniques of color print among other things. By 1900, a variety of popular and specialists periodicals were available to the general public, including science journals like *National Geographic*, fashion magazines like *Glass of Fashion* and

¹ See Martha Jane Nadell, *Enter the New Negroes: Images of Race in American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7.

Home Arts, quality monthly magazines like *Harper's* and *Scribner's* alongside cheap weeklies.²

Modernist writing and visual art permeated and was informed by magazines and black cultural movement spanning the 1910s through to the 1930s was no exception. While “New Negro” or “Negro Renaissance” publication houses and patronage were often in the hands of a select number of whites, New Negro coverage in magazines was generally more interracial in character. Indeed, one of the most important documents of the “Negro Renaissance”, as it was then known, was a March 1925 special issue of *Survey Graphic*, “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro” which was the result of a collaboration between the journal’s white Michigan-born editor, Paul Kellogg, and African-American philosopher Alain Locke.³

Kellogg’s and Locke’s collaboration itself emerged on account of Charles S. Johnson, a behind-the-scenes operator and editor of *Opportunity*, a mouthpiece of the civil rights organization, the National Urban League. Johnson engineered a “coming-out” dinner at the Civic Club on March 21 1924 for a new generation of young New Negro writers. Johnson enlisted Alain Locke, then a Howard professor of philosophy, to act as master of ceremonies. Speeches were given by notable figures from the literary world, including publisher Horace Liveright, W. E. B. Du Bois and the African-American poets James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Georgia Douglas Johnson and Gwendolyn Bennett. That night Kellogg approached Locke over the special issue. The “Harlem number” that resulted proved incredibly successful. Selling 42,000 copies, it was the journal’s best-selling issue. Two months before its publication, the publishers Albert and Charles Boni commissioned Locke to produce a book based on the issue. This would become the anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, published in late 1925, which re-used material from the *Survey Graphic* issue and expanded upon it considerably.

Locke’s *Survey Graphic* “Harlem number”, and its successor, *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925), heralded the arrival of a black renaissance. Locke defined *The*

² Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: Univ of Illinois Press, 1956), 2-3.

³ “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro,” *Survey Graphic* 6, no. 6 (March 1925).

New Negro as an exemplar of “the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance” and issued a definitive call to arms for a young generation of black artists, asserting “that any vital artistic expression of the Negro theme and subject in art must break through the stereotypes to a new style, a distinctive fresh technique, and some sort of characteristic idiom”.⁴

Locke’s commitment to overcoming black stereotypes was evident in his two major 1925 publications. In both the *Survey Graphic* Harlem issue and *The New Negro*, Locke championed the work of German illustrator Winold Reiss, as the principal artist to illustrate the “characteristic idiom” of the New Negro. The question of how this New Negro should be represented was far from straightforward however. The legacies of colonialism, white hegemony, racism, the emergence of “primitivism”, the segregationist Jim Crow laws of the US South and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan left its toll on the representation of black people—a factor black intellectuals were acutely aware of. Around 1925 and 1926, the matter of how black people should be represented became especially heated.

Reiss’s artwork for the March *Survey Graphic* issue was a case in point. In April 1925 at a Harlem branch of the New York Public Library, Paul Kellogg came under fire for selecting Locke, a non-Harlemite to edit the issue, while Reiss’s exhibited pictures caused, as Elise McDougald wrote to Locke, a “furore”.⁵ One picture, “Two Public School Teachers” provoked controversy, with one spectator ruminating as to whether “the whole art side of the issue were a ‘piece of subtle propaganda to prejudice the white reader’”. He added that “he would be afraid of them” if he met them. In response, one of teachers in the work, Miss Price, defended the work as a “pretty good likeness”.⁶

⁴ Alain Locke, ed. *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: A. and C. Boni, 1925), xi, 266-267. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

⁵ Quoted in George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1997), 394.

⁶ Jeffrey C. Stewart, *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 480-481. Hereafter cited parenthetically.



Figure 1. Winold Reiss, “Two Public School Teachers”, *Survey Graphic*, March 1925, 687 (Courtesy: London School of Economics Library).⁷

⁷ Hereafter cited as LSE Library.

In an article, "To Certain of our Philistines" that features in the May 1925 issue of *Opportunity*, Locke defended the *Survey Graphic* issue, claiming that the anxious reception to Reiss's artwork was rather a result of prejudice towards his dark-skinned figures.⁸ In Locke's view, the Reiss's sketch of the schoolteachers reflected figures from his "own profession" in realistic and symbolic terms. In addition, it presented "a professional ideal" which he was "glad to think representative of both . . . [his] profession and especially its racial aspects" (156).

Locke's discussion of representatives draws upon the terminology of the social sciences, an area which had not only influenced Locke's scholarship, but also informed magazines like *Opportunity* and the *Survey Graphic*, a richly illustrated version of the sociological magazine the *Survey*. The *Survey Graphic* Harlem issue employed "types" in ways which suggested that the New Negroes in its pages were studies and quite distinct from the readers and writers of the magazine. For the most part, the types and portraits in the *Survey Graphic* Harlem issue are African American, but only one representative of the Caribbean features overtly, "A Woman from the Virgin Islands" (685). This visual representation is more US-centric than the range of contributors, four of whom were Caribbean (Claude McKay, Arthur Schomburg, J. A. Rogers and W. A. Domingo). Domingo's essay "The Tropics in New York" is the most overtly Caribbean piece, raising concerns about Caribbean migrants' lives in New York. Indebted to Claude McKay's poem of the same name, which is included in a framed inset at the bottom left-hand corner, the essay lays emphasis on the uneasy intraracial, interethnic relations between Afro-Caribbeans—predominantly from the British Caribbean—and African Americans. In Domingo's view Afro-Caribbeans' flamboyant dress sense, non-conformism, entrepreneurialism and radicalism, made them the "butt of many a jest" among African Americans.⁹ The article also outlined not only the relatively recent life cycle of Caribbean migration to Harlem, but set this in a long history of Caribbean migration to New York; the conclusion one might draw on reading this prior to the succeeding article, "Harlem

⁸ Alain Locke, "To Certain of Our Philistines," *Opportunity* 3, no. 29 (May 1925): 155. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

⁹ W. A. Domingo, "The Tropics in New York," *Survey Graphic* 6, no. 6 (March 1925): 650.

Types”, is that a not uncommon Harlem type was of Caribbean extraction. Formally, this isn’t apparent in the “Harlem Types” illustrations.¹⁰

However, Harold Jackman, a second-generation Barbadian and on-off lover of Countee Cullen, served as the model for “A college lad” (Figure 2). It seems somewhat ironic that this hidden figure of partial Caribbean descent, then, features not as the flamboyantly dressed stereotype of an Afro-Caribbean male but rather as a representative figure of African-American sophistication in dress, elegance and education: in short an idealized icon of racial uplift. This absence is all the more emphasized by Locke’s linkage of Reiss’s art to Africa in “Harlem Types” as opposed to the wider Americas, and in particular, the Caribbean (653). One reason for this emphasis undoubtedly was related to the fact that the issue was more concerned with interracial than interethnic portrayal. Hence, the black American of the United States and his homeland, Africa, are brought to the fore in ways which mirror discourse on white Americans and Europe as the mother continent.

¹⁰ “Harlem Types: Portraits by Winold Reiss,” *Survey Graphic* 6, no. 6 (March 1925). Hereafter cited parenthetically.

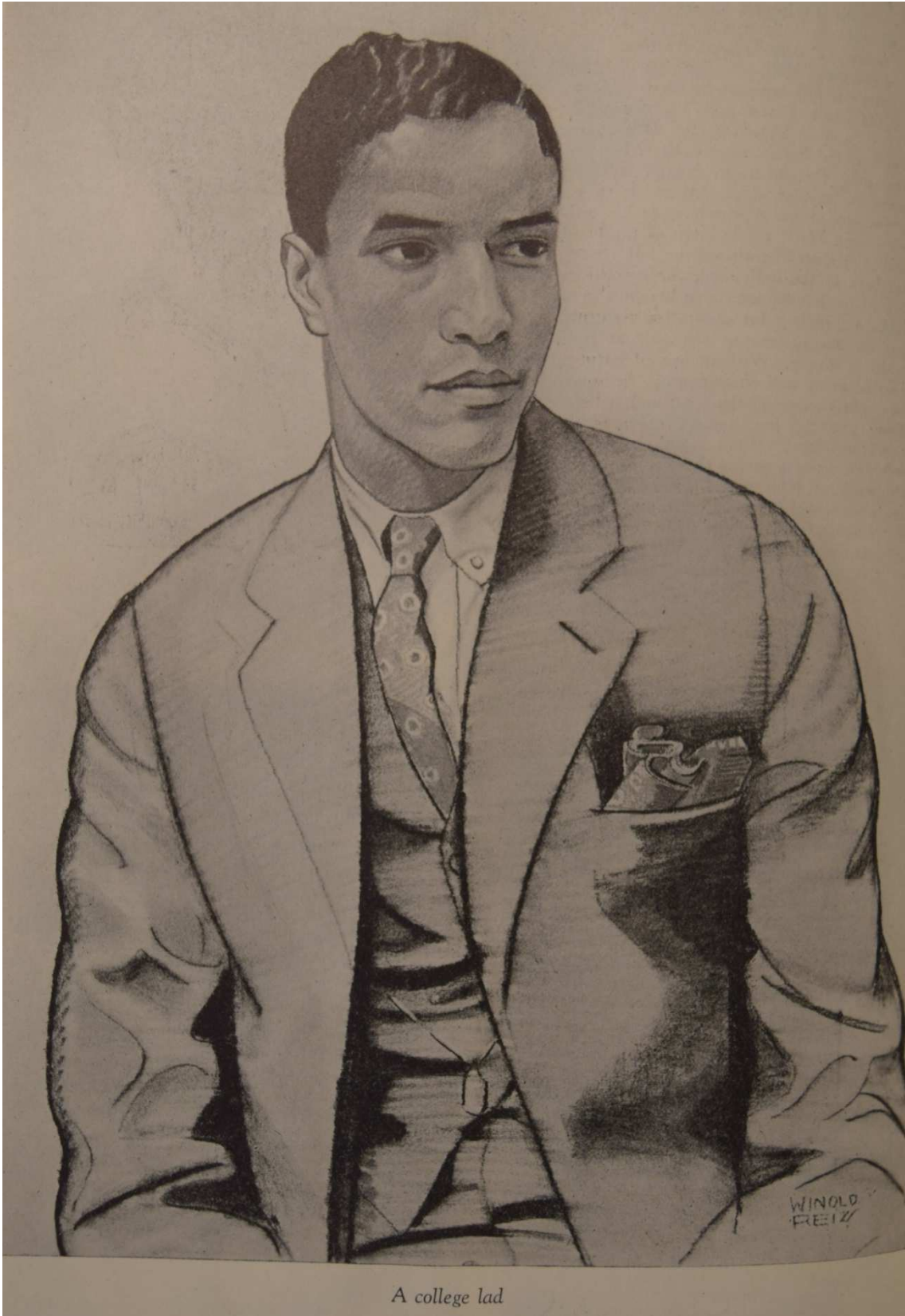


Figure 2. Winold Reiss, "A college lad", *Survey Graphic*, March 1925, 654 (Courtesy: LSE Library).

The success of the Harlem number undoubtedly placed constraints on its successor, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. African Americans of status, sensing the importance of Locke's project, lined themselves up for representation in his work. Both W. E. B. Du Bois and Robert R. Moton, Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee successor, had sat for Winold Reiss prior to the publication of the *Survey Graphic* Harlem number, presumably hoping to be included. Kellogg pondered the commercial benefits of the inclusion of their portraits in a letter to Locke. Locke, however, felt their inclusion went against the spirit of their special issue and won out the argument as their images were omitted from the issue (Stewart, 473-5). Come the summer of 1925, Locke could not be so choosy. On 16 June that year, Emmett Scott, Secretary-Treasurer of Howard University's Board of Trustees, wrote to Locke to inform him that the University would not renew his contract. Now out of work, but very much busy with a large editorial project, Locke could ill-afford to make enemies among the black bourgeoisie. The *Survey Graphic* issue had already upset Robert R. Moton who had called the Survey offices to complain about lack of coverage of Hampton-Tuskegee style education which he had overseen for years (Stewart, 477, 473).

The dissonance between the presence of Caribbean contributors and the visual signifiers of the New Negro greatly increase from the *Survey Graphic* Harlem number to *The New Negro*. Firstly, the latter presents portraits of an African American elite: Alain Locke, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Roland Hayes, Charles S. Johnson, James W. Johnson, Robert R. Moton, Elise Johnson McDougald, Mary McLeod Bethune and W. E. B. Du Bois. In addition, a good deal of these were printed in color, an expensive venture that was not replicated in subsequent reprints. While the section "Negro Youth Speaks" suggests that the anthology is in part a celebration of a young generation of artists, visually speaking the publication only had two such representatives (Jean Toomer and Countee Cullen), with the rest 40 years old or upwards. The portrait of a Virgin Islands' woman becomes a figure, as her caption states, "From the Tropic isles" (Figures 3 and 4), displacing her from her specific Caribbean homeland and transposing her within a generic tropical milieu. The visual pantheon of elite African Americans in color undoubtedly was included to

assert “representatives” in the idealized sense. What readers are confronted by is a visual equivalent of Du Bois’s “talented tenth”. In doing this, Locke reproduced an “uplift” agenda, while rebuffing the early criticism of Reiss’s work. Black America (US) dominates black representation in the text, while references to Africa and the Caribbean generally appear secondary and tertiary respectively. The interracial dynamics of black and white representation predominate over the intraracial dimensions between different black groups, which perhaps would not translate all too well in a visual form.

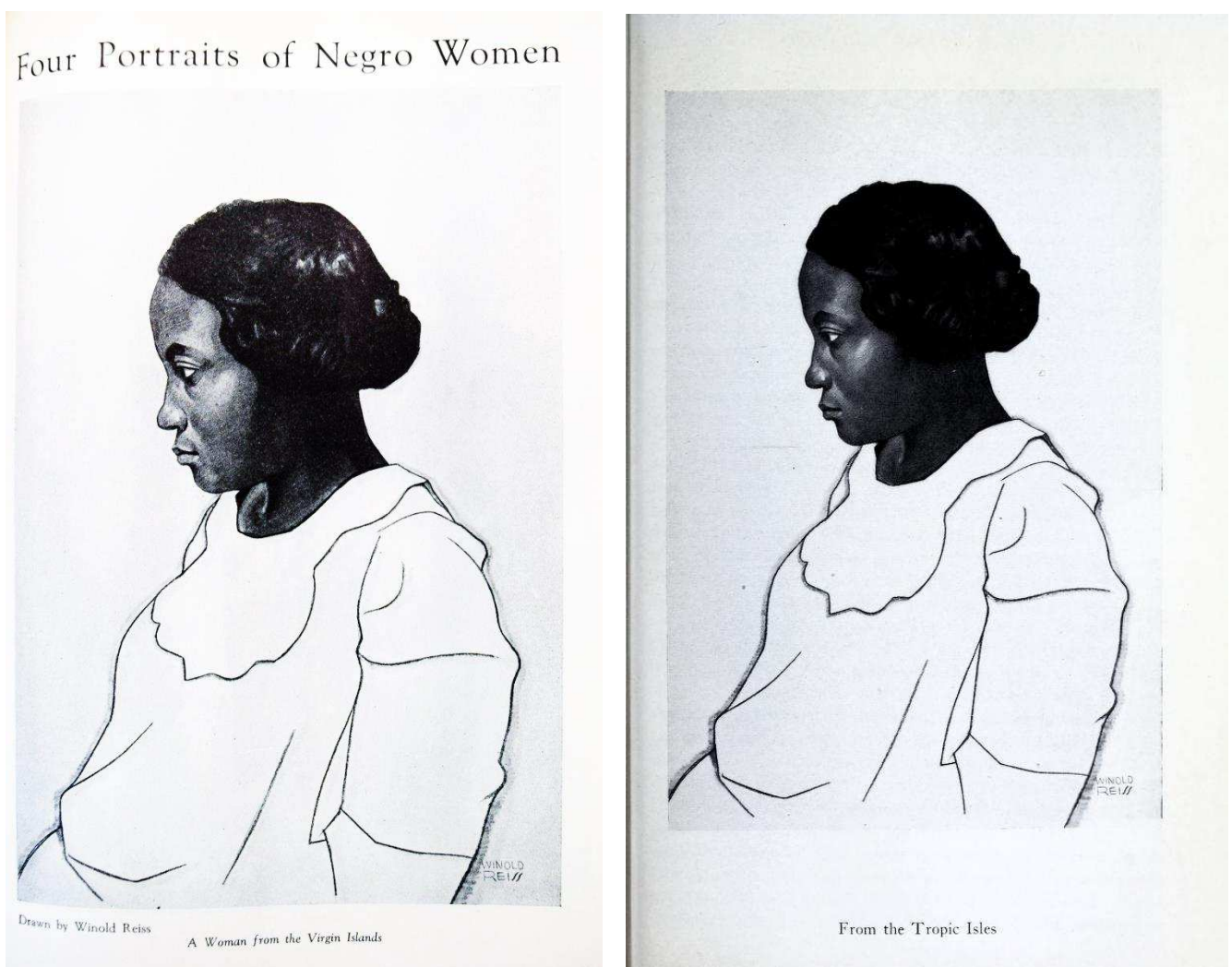


Figure 3. Winold Reiss, “A Woman from the Virgin Islands”, *Survey Graphic*, March 1925, 685 (Courtesy: LSE); **Figure 4.** Winold Reiss, “From the Tropic Isles”, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, facing page 342 (Courtesy: State Library of Pennsylvania).

Four months prior to the publication of Locke's *Survey Graphic* issue, *Vanity Fair* ran a two-page sketch entitled "Enter, the New Negro, a Distinctive Type Recently Created by the Coloured Cabaret Belt in New York" illustrated by Miguel Covarrubias with captions by Guyanese-Barbadian-Panamanian émigré writer, Eric Walrond (Figure 5). Walrond most likely knew of Locke's essay prior to publication as he had been closely involved with organizing the Civic Club dinner which resulted in the *Survey's* editor, Paul Kellogg, approaching Locke with the offer of a special issue. In addition, he had been commissioned to write an essay for the issue which never materialized. The sketch serves an interesting counterpoint to Locke's version of the New Negro. Collectively, its creators dismiss the figure of the Old Negro, both in the subtitle ("Exit, the Coloured Crooner of Lullabys, the Cotton-Picker, the Mammy Singer and the Darky Banjo-Player, for so Long Over-Exploited Figures on the American stage") and an introductory editorial, perhaps written by *Vanity Fair* editor, Frank Crowninshield ("Not the old type [of Negro], of course. The lullaby singer has gone. Also the plantation darkey."). Yet Walrond's captions and Covarrubias's illustrations, which celebrate the cabaret, are tonally and visually distinct from Locke's oeuvre in various ways. Composed of eight sketches of cabaret figures, the illustrations and captions are comic and light in tone, skirting close at first glance to blackface. The everted lips and bared teeth of "dis Strutter", a gloved and suited cabaret dandy, who "Tu'n mo' tricks 'n a monkey" may have unsettled some respectable, senior or old guard black intellectuals—and risk troubling associations today.¹¹

¹¹ Miguel Covarrubias and Eric Walrond, "Enter, the New Negro, a Distinctive Type Recently Created by the Coloured Cabaret Belt in New York," *Vanity Fair* 23, no. 4 (December 1924).

editorial ventriloquist, decided that it was “not literature”.¹³ This dismissal of dialect, vaudeville and Covarrubias gives a sense of Du Bois’s probable judgement of Walrond’s and Covarrubias’s *Vanity Fair* collaboration, which played out over several issues. A February 1925 Walrond-Covarrubias sketch in *Vanity Fair*, “The Increasing Vogue of the Negro Revue on Broadway”, made reference to “Harlem . . . as the Mecca not only of the Negro poet and creative artist but of the writer of the musical revue”. While this text suggests an editorial awareness of Locke’s *Survey Graphic* Harlem issue a month prior to its publication, it signals a departure from Locke’s vision. Song and dance remain paramount, innovative forms shaping both black and white cultural spheres in Harlem and Broadway. Although the editorial text, possibly authored by Crowninshield, singles out the musical review “writer”, the captions written by Walrond focus on the dancers and use dialect. Accompanying a dapper smiling figure with teeth but no eyes, labelled “Kind O’ Reculiar”, the caption reads ““Don’t nobawdy ca’ah faw me!” –Kigh Sigh Sambo’s racially esoteric refrain of a lively old ditty”.¹⁴ The closeness potentially here to blackface both visually and tonally is quite distinct from anything in Locke’s 1925 publications. In fact, the blackface performance, if one reads it as such, is complicated by Walrond’s racial identity. As an Afro-Caribbean, his performance was double. Introduced in the December 1924 *Vanity Fair* issue as a “talented Negro poet”, despite being a prose writer, and as a “Negro writer” in the February 1925 *Vanity Fair* issue, no mention is made of his Caribbean ethnicity. If this is to be read in terms of a black mask, then it is that of an Afro-Caribbean adopting African-American personae and dialect. There are parallels between Walrond and another Caribbean-American, Bert Williams, a light-skinned blackface star who Walrond much admired and who could perform as an African American with no trace of an accent. Similarly, Walrond’s Caribbean identity is not flagged in these articles, and so he functions as an authenticator of black culture in a “white” magazine. This particular black mask may have suited Walrond, who perhaps hoped to capitalize on the inability of *Vanity Fair*’s readers to place him.

¹³ “The Browsing Reader.”

¹⁴ Miguel Covarrubias and Eric Walrond, “The Increasing Vogue of the Negro Revue on Broadway,” *Vanity Fair* 23, no. 6 (February 1925).

Dialect itself as a mode of black representation was on tender ground among some senior New Negroes. In his anthology *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), James Weldon Johnson wrote:

Negro dialect is at present a medium that is not capable of giving expression to the varied conditions of Negro life in America, and much less is it capable of giving the fullest interpretation of Negro character and psychology. This is no indictment against the dialect as dialect, but against the mould of convention in which Negro dialect in the United States has been set.¹⁵

Johnson was careful not to dismiss dialect as a form of expression, but rather the conventions within which it generally functioned in media. Despite his reservations, the anthology features a mixture of dialect and non-dialect poetry. In addition, Johnson's introduction demonstrates some real admiration of dialect, particularly in relation to Claude McKay's early Jamaican poetry, which he hypothesized as "more touching and charming" than any other work he would produce (xliv). Just why Johnson so admired McKay's Jamaican dialect, but felt notable anxieties about African-American dialect is unclear. It is not hard to see a certain ethnocentrism at work in which the Caribbean is imagined at a distance as a region of picturesque regional speech while the United States—Johnson's homeland—is read as a pitched battleground in which representative racial codes must be fiercely protected. Caribbean writers like McKay and Walrond, not to mention a host of African-American writers including Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, John Matheus, all made use of dialect in their fiction. Their connection to black people in places like Harlem, Washington D. C., the US South and the Caribbean would have reinforced their awareness of the polyphony of black accents. In particular, for Caribbean writers like McKay and Walrond, dialect may have served as an index of ethnic identification, signposting not only the territories they had come from but also their foreignness in the United States. Dialect, therefore, may have been looked upon by Caribbean-Americans writers as a kind of ethnographic "authenticator". In a 1929

¹⁵ James Weldon Johnson, ed. *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), xli. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

issue of the magazine *American Speech*, Nathan van Patten characterized Walrond's use of dialect in his short story collection *Tropic Death* (1926) as offering "remarkable transcriptions of the speech of the Negro in Panama, Honduras, Barbadoes and Guinea. It has a distinct value in any study of Negro speech in these countries".¹⁶

Around the time that *The New Negro* was hitting the press in the winter of 1925, Locke argued in favor of Covarrubias's comic style in *Opportunity*:

This typical Latin interest and tradition, with its kindly farce in which there is no hint of social offense or disparagement, no matter how broad or caricaturistic the brush, is familiar to us now in the work of Miguel Covarrubias. It may yet be an antidote for that comic art which is so responsible for the hypersensitive feelings of American Negroes and stands between them and the full appreciation of any portrayal of race types. Surely the time has come when we should have our own comic and semi-serious art, and our own Cruikshanks and Max Beerbohms.¹⁷

Covarrubias himself did not see his work as caricaturist, but argued that his work was "done from a more serious point of view".¹⁸ Notably, both Covarrubias and Walrond were incorporated into *The New Negro*, though their work was separated out. Walrond's Panama-based short story "The Palm Porch" features in the fiction sub-section of "Negro Youth Speaks", and Covarrubias's illustration from the December 1924 *Vanity Fair* issue ("That Teasin' Yalla Gal") is republished as the "blues singer" who is located beneath Langston Hughes's poem, "Nude Young Dancer".¹⁹ If Covarrubias raised eyebrows in the *Crisis*, he was to some extent tamed in Locke's *The New Negro*, as well as made to occupy the same virtual space with the *Crisis*'s editor, — his arch-critic — Du Bois.

¹⁶ Nathan van Patten, "Organization of Source Material for the Study of American English and American Dialects," *American Speech* 4, no. 6 (1929): 428-429.

¹⁷ Alain Locke, "More of the Negro in Art," *Opportunity* 3, no. 36 (December 1925): 364.

¹⁸ Quoted in Nadell, *Enter the New Negroes*: 103.

¹⁹ In addition to this, one other Covarrubias's illustration 'jazz' is listed as featuring on p. 225 though it is missing from this page which contains Gwendolyn Bennett's poem, 'Song', only.

In February 1926, Du Bois ran with a questionnaire in the *Crisis*, later packaged as the symposium “The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed?”, which he put to his readers and significant art world spokespeople over several months.²⁰ The moment itself could be said to reflect not so much a crisis in the representation of black people, but rather the anxieties of the New Negro literati as the vogue for the Negro expanded. The opening question sets the overall tenor of succeeding questions: “When the artist, black or white, portrays Negro characters is he under any obligations or limitations as to the sort of character he will portray?”²¹ The symposium generated numerous responses from a number of illustrious authors and publishers. Broadly speaking, the respondents to Du Bois’s questionnaire either affirmed or rejected the notion that the artist had a responsibility to represent black people positively, with only a few sitting on the fence. In the first printed response that featured in the March issue, Van Vechten defended the freedom of the artist:

I am fully aware of the reasons of why Negroes are sensitive in regards to fiction which attempts to picture the lower strata of the race. . . . The squalor of Negro life, the vice of Negro life, offer a wealth of novel, exotic, picturesque material to the artist. . . . Are Negro writers going to write about this exotic material while it is still fresh or will they continue to make a free gift of it to white authors who will exploit it until not a drop of vitality remains? (219)

Langston Hughes, H. L. Mencken, Charles W. Chesnutt, Walter White and Mary Ovington White all roughly championed the freedom of the artist. Countee Cullen, Benjamin Brawley and Jessie Fauset, the *Crisis* literary editor and Du Bois’s lover, were among the few who agreed with Du Bois’s argument that the writer should apply restraint.

Interestingly, while most studies of this debate collapse the symposium into what Du Bois in part made it, a black and white issue over black representation in the arts,

²⁰ “A Questionnaire,” *The Crisis* 31, no. 4 (February 1926). Beginning life as a questionnaire in the February issue of the *Crisis*, “The Negro in Art” symposium was only officially announced in the magazine’s March issue. Questions and answers to the questionnaire/symposium were published in the magazine from February to June and August to November 1926.

²¹ “The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed?,” *The Crisis* 31, no. 5 (March 1926). Hereafter cited parenthetically.

the roots of the symposium contain a virtually hidden Caribbean component, that rarely surfaces in the historiography of the New Negro. The November 1925 issue of the *Crisis* carried a stinging review of Haldane Macfall's novel, *The Wooings of Jezebel Pettyfer*. Originally published in 1897, the book had been republished by Knopf in 1925, most likely after encouragement from Carl Van Vechten, who appears to have had a partial or complete hand in scripting the advertisements published by Knopf in the *American Mercury* and the *Saturday Review of Literature* in September and October 1925 respectively. Not one to shy away from hyperbole, Van Vechten described the novel as "probably the best novel yet written about the Negro" and claimed it as the work of an "artist", not a "professional humorist". What humor was there was belonged to "the Negro" and was not that "of a cartoonist".²² However, the November *Crisis* reviewer, Emmett J. Scott, noting the enthusiasm for the novel in Knopf's adverts, claimed that Macfall had performed a kind of artificial blackface in comparing him to the writers Octavus Roy Cohen, Thomas Nelson Page, illustrator E. W. Kemble, and the blackface actor, Al Jolson—all white, all criticized for dealing in black stereotypes. Ultimately, for Scott, Macfall belonged to this field and was in his view a "Negro-hater".²³

Five months prior to this review on June 16 1925, Scott—Locke's nemesis at Howard—had written to Locke to communicate that his employment at the university was effectively terminated. Then Secretary-Treasurer of Howard, Scott had served as Secretary of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute between 1912 and 1917, and later as Special Assistant for Negro Affairs to the Secretary of War—making him the highest ranking African American in the War Department. Distinguished and respectable, Scott was also deeply conservative.

In response to Scott's criticism of the Macfall's book, Van Vechten wrote to W. E. B. Du Bois on October 29 1925 in defence of the book and his promotion of it. He wrote of the "explicable tendency" in black people to be "sensitive" with respect to their

²² "The Borzoi Broadside for September 1925," *American Mercury* 6, no. 21 (September 1925): xx. The Borzoi Broadside advertorial ascribes no author, however, the subsequent *Saturday Review* advert replicates some of the same copy verbatim, attributing Van Vechten as the spokesperson. Knopf, "The Wooings of Jezebel Pettyfer," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, October 3 1925.

²³ Emmett J. Scott, review of *The Wooings of Jezebel Pettyfer*, *The Crisis* 31, no. 1 (November 1925): 32.

representation on the page, but argued that such a stance could place “destructive” limits on black writers interested in “speaking any truth which might be considered unpleasant”.²⁴ Du Bois replied on November 5, asking to quote from the letter in a forthcoming article on “the problems of Negro art” that he intended to publish in the *Crisis*.²⁵ Then a few days later on November 9, Du Bois wrote to Van Vechten again, elated with “a brilliant idea” for “a symposium on freedom in Negro art”.²⁶ Imagining it initially as running for just two issues (and not from February until November as was the case), he envisaged attaining contributions from Heywood Dubose, Rudolph Fisher and Winold Reiss.

Just prior to the February 1926 initiation of the *Crisis* symposium, the debate over Macfall’s novel was carried out in the Urban League’s organ, *Opportunity*, under Charles S. Johnson’s editorship. In the December 1925 issue of the journal, Countee Cullen opened a review of Du Bose Heyward’s *Porgy* accordingly: “A few weeks ago I felt that . . . I could match Carl Van Vechten’s appraisal of THE WOOINGS OF JEZEBEL PETTYFER as the best novel on the Negro by a white author that I had read. Since then, however, I have read PORGY”.²⁷ Cullen paid deference to Van Vechten, who was very much a part of his social circle by late 1925, while simultaneously knocking Macfall’s novel off the top-spot allotted to it. A month later, *Opportunity* carried a glowing review of Macfall’s novel from none other than Clarissa M. Scott, the daughter of Emmett Scott, who had so vociferously condemned the novel as racist. Far from reading this as the work of a “Negro-hater” like her father, Clarissa judged this to be a novel “compounded of laughter and joy, of understanding and discernment”. For her, the laughter evoked in the reader was not one of “superiority” but rather one of “understanding and tenderness and appreciation of human character”.²⁸

²⁴ Van Vechten to Du Bois, October 29, 1925, Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, MS 312. Hereafter WDB.

²⁵ Quoted in Herbert Aptheker, ed. *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois: Selections, 1877-1934*, vol. I (Amherst: Univ. of Mass. Press, 1997), 324-325.

²⁶ Du Bois to Van Vechten, November 9 1925, 1925, WDB.

²⁷ Countee Cullen, review of *Porgy*, *Opportunity* 3, no. 36 (December 1925): 379.

²⁸ Clarissa M. Scott, review of *The Wooings of Jezebel Pettyfer*, *Opportunity* 4, no. 36 (January 1926): 26-27.

The stage was set then for the symposium that ensued in February 1926. In his defence of Macfall to Du Bois in October, Van Vechten admitted, “Whether or not it presents an accurate picture of Negro life in the Barbadoes I have no means of knowing; I have never been in the Barbadoes” – lines which were unaltered in his February 1926 *Vanity Fair* article, “Moanin’ wid a Sword in Mah Han’”.²⁹ Van Vechten not only dismissed the setting, but glossed the fact that much of the novel is also set in Jamaica. His response, to a large extent, echoes what happened in the course of the symposium. The Caribbean, or its representation, was barely a reference point, as the burning issue concerned black representation, and, not too implicitly, black representation by whites. However, on May 1 1926, the *Saturday Review of Literature* published a review of Macfall’s novel by Eric Walrond which aimed to address this tropical lacuna. Walrond was careful to reference the positions of both his friends, Van Vechten and Cullen (“I was constrained to admit it the best novel on the Negro that I had read; but since that time ‘Porgy’ has come”, 756), but ultimately read the book as “incapable of achieving a pure view of the tropical life”. While Walrond claimed he was “not sensitive” with regards to the “transcriptions of the speech of the West Indian peasantry”, he took issue with Macfall’s representation of cultured Afro-Caribbeans in the novel. To stress his point, he listed a number of outstanding Caribbean intellectuals as exemplars, including Hector Joseph, the first black attorney general of British Guiana, Albert Marryshaw, the long-serving Grenadian editor of the *West Indian*, and Herbert de Lisser, a prolific Jamaican journalist and author.³⁰ In the tugs of war over black representation, Walrond generally went against the grain of a Du Boisian agenda of aesthetic uplift. Ironically, here, however, Walrond’s aesthetic judgement bears similarities to that of the more senior New Negro wing, in that his objections concern the apparent ill-formed portraits of the “respectable” set; these figures, according to Walrond, ought to have been better represented. While Macfall’s novel, itself, undoubtedly is not without its problems in terms of its essentialism and exoticism for the modern

²⁹ Van Vechten to Du Bois, October 29. Carl Van Vechten, “Moanin’ wid a Sword in Mah Han’,” *Vanity Fair* 25, no. 6 (February 1926): 102.

³⁰ Eric Walrond, “Mr. MacFall’s ‘Jezebel’,” *The Saturday Review of Literature*, May 1 1926. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

reader, a question mark remains as to what type of humor Macfall was aiming for in this work. In Walrond's view, it would have been acceptable had "it [been] conceived in the garb of burlesque". However, he saw the joke as working "at the expense of a people whose culture and moral precepts ought to be intelligible" to the author (756). Whether the jokes went too far or not was obviously down to the reader. At least two black readers – Cullen and Clarissa Scott – thought not, but they were probably, like Van Vechten, unfamiliar with Barbados.

Macfall himself would enter the fray of the *Crisis* symposium a month after Walrond's review came out. Responding principally to Scott's criticisms, Macfall wrote that Scott was "within his rights to find my novel feeble in wit and humour". Yet Macfall rejected the idea that he had "sustained contempt" or "hatred" for black people, recalling the love he inspired in his Afro-Jamaican troops when stationed at Port Royal. The anecdote places him in an imperial frame which hints at a sense of superiority in relation to the soldiers he commanded. Nevertheless, it also indicates some ambiguity. In his *Crisis* article, Macfall made reference to "a bronze god of a man whom they called 'Long' Burke", fictionalized in his novel, whom he feared would attack him. In a tale of mastery, resembling that of *Robinson Crusoe*, Macfall outlined how he gave Burke a light punishment for ill-behavior and essentially won his loyalty, leading to his becoming "the most devoted friend to me for the rest of his service".³¹ A friendship that lasts for as long as a contract is probably not the best example of genuine friendship, nevertheless, the autobiographical reference establishes his position as a superior in relation to a servant, as well as something like a friend – however unequitable the relationship – to his black associate.

Whatever the differences of perspective, both Walrond and Macfall drew attention to the Caribbean dimension of the latter's novel, extending a hitherto US-centric discussion beyond the shores of the United States. For Du Bois and Van Vechten, Macfall's Caribbean setting was superfluous to the discussion of black representation. As a result, the ensuing *Crisis* symposium barely referenced Macfall's work, or took into account why a novel set in the Caribbean might be read as exotic,

³¹ "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed?," *The Crisis* 32, no. 2 (June 1926): 73.

or problematically, by black residents in the US. The matter was collapsed into issues of black and white representation (and this is broadly how the debate is remembered today) instead of being problematized in terms of different geographies with distinct relations of power. Largely under colonial control by European powers in the 1920s, the Caribbean was quite unlike the independent United States; culturally, Afro-Caribbeans and African Americans may have seen themselves as quite distinct, even where there were shared legacies of racial exclusion, transatlantic displacement and slavery. It is quite possible that these factors, coupled with the absence of Caribbean pictorial or written representation in Locke's 1925 New Negro projects and Du Bois's *Crisis* symposium, prompted Eric Walrond's to push for a Caribbean special issue of *Opportunity* in November 1926 while he was business manager of the magazine. Charles S. Johnson's motivation in accepting Walrond's proposition of a Caribbean issue as *Opportunity's* editor may well have been due to his being left out in the cold—as Du Bois and Locke jostled for authority over the New Negro generation of artists. Johnson, after all, had masterminded the very dinner which had led to Locke's *Survey Graphic* issue, though he was a less obvious beneficiary of the evening. Johnson was probably the most open out of himself, Locke and Du Bois to a trans-American partnership and, crucially, debate. Bankrolled by the Virgin Islander, Caspar Holstein, a notorious and unusually erudite lottery kingpin, for literary contests in 1926 and 1927, *Opportunity* was by 1926 a partly US-Caribbean venture and hence, unsurprisingly, it fell to Johnson, with prompting from Walrond, and the promise of further funding from Holstein, to address the Caribbean silence of his African-American colleagues. While the November 1926 Caribbean special issue of *Opportunity* was perhaps less sensational, ambitious or attention-grabbing than either Locke's or Du Bois's editorial work over 1925 and 1926, it succeeded at least in raising the issue of the Caribbean presence within the New Negro movement, and consequentially, its Renaissance.

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