ABSTRACT

COSMOPOLITANISM AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN MODERNISM:
WRITING INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH THE TROPE OF INTERRACIAL ROMANCE

by Tracy Savoie

In our global age, it is essential that we adopt an ethical way of thinking about the world which stresses our commonalities while still respecting the important differences between us—cosmopolitanism. This thesis argues that W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Dark Princess*, the Pool Group’s film *Borderline*, and James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* demonstrate how cosmopolitanism can be put into practice. Through their modernist questioning of identity construction and sense of double-consciousness, each of these texts suggests that intercultural coalitions can be formed when marginalized peoples use their exclusion from society as a common bond. My reading of these texts suggests that in addition to feminism and socialism, which formed political affiliations across national boundaries, an anti-colonial and anti-racist stance can also aid in creating cross-cultural coalitions. Recognizing the importance of anti-colonialism and anti-racism allows us to see the significant place that African American authors and interracial modernist works hold in the evolution of cosmopolitan thought in the twentieth century.
COSMOPOLITANISM AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN MODERNISM:
WRITING INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH THE TROPE OF
INTERRACIAL ROMANCE

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of English
by
Tracy Savoie
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2008

Advisor ______________________
Madelyn Detlof

Reader ______________________
Timothy Melley

Reader ______________________
Andrew Hebard
Table of Contents

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1
Re-Defining Cosmopolitanism ............................................................................................ 1
Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism .................................................................................... 2
Cosmopolitanism and Modernism ..................................................................................... 5
Putting the Pieces Together: The Politics of Identity ....................................................... 9
Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism in W.E.B Du Bois’ *Dark Princess: A Romance* ....... 12
Matthew as American Cosmopolitan ............................................................................ 14
The Marriage of Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism ....................................................... 21
A Place for Cosmopolitanism .......................................................................................... 26
Modernist Primitivism and a Cosmopolitan Indictment of Racism: The Pool Group’s *Borderline* .......................................................... 31
Borderline’s Primitivst Discourse .................................................................................... 34
Psychoanalysis and Anti-Racism ....................................................................................... 37
The “We” of Racism ........................................................................................................ 40
A Comparison to Cunard’s “Black Man and White Ladyship” ......................................... 46
The (Im)possibility of Cosmopolitan Romance in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* .... 50
Sexuality and Race ........................................................................................................... 54
American Myths ............................................................................................................... 55
Can One Be an American and a Cosmopolitan? .............................................................. 60
The Possibilities of Love .................................................................................................. 64
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 68
Introduction

Re-Defining Cosmopolitanism

Today, cosmopolitanism is an often-discussed and much-contested term in academic circles. Recent debates about cosmopolitanism have, as Bruce Robbins claims in his introduction to Cosmopolitics, redefined the figure of the cosmopolitan, questioned the notion that cosmopolitanism and nationalism are antagonistic terms, and explored its possibilities for encouraging political action. The current recuperation of cosmopolitanism is a reaction to global capitalism and its affects on how nationalism is articulated. Critics are leery of the past efforts of humanism—the belief that ethical decisions could be made based on universal human qualities, particularly rationality—which tends to erase difference and has been frequently co-opted by imperialist ventures; however, these critics also realize that globalization has forced formerly disparate parts of the world to come together and that it is necessary to have a way of thinking about the world which puts our responsibility to others at the forefront. As Amanda Anderson states, “Cosmopolitanism has repeatedly emerged at times when the world has suddenly seemed to expand in unassimilable ways; it is at these moments that universalism needs the rhetoric of worldliness that cosmopolitanism provides” (272). Paul Gilroy is one critic who, in his book Postcolonial Melancholia, seeks to recover cosmopolitanism from a limited humanism and see it as an ethical conception of worldliness which is an alternative to globalization. For Gilroy, multiculturalism, though it does recognize difference, lacks the ability to bring people together. Many of the debates about cosmopolitanism, then, center on how to encourage a feeling of responsibility for those across the world while still stressing the importance of local loyalties and cultural differences.

My analysis will be similar to Gilroy’s in that I too plan to explore the possibilities that cosmopolitan thinking has for creating coalitions across boundaries. In my thesis, I examine three texts—W.E.B. Du Bois’ novel Dark Princess, the Pool group’s film Borderline, and James Baldwin’s Giovanni’s Room—for how these texts can help us to think about the complications and possibilities that cosmopolitanism provides. Each text is cosmopolitan in that each expresses a belief in a common humanity while still acknowledging local differences and counters social

---

1 Amanda Anderson states, in “Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity,” that “…the new interest in cosmopolitanism stems largely from a concern with the question of nationalism...” (276).
norms which bar our understanding of the Other. In *Dark Princess*, Du Bois demonstrates how the common experiences of racism and imperialism among people of color around the world can be used to bring these groups together. For the film *Borderline*, the tendency toward and experience of racism is what makes us all vulnerable and therefore human. In *Giovanni’s Room*, the main character realizes how the social norms of his home country, the United States, have led him to deny his sexuality and his humanity.

In addition to acting as examples of how cosmopolitanism can be expressed through attention to the histories of racism, fascism, and imperialism, these texts enable us to think through the difficulties involved in cosmopolitan thinking. As Tania Friedel puts it, cosmopolitanism is “a mode of critical thinking that is committed to struggling with the paradoxes and contradictions of cultural identity and discourse” (5). These paradoxes and contradictions often involve the juggling of local and universal loyalties. The texts that I have chosen are particularly useful, given the rise of nationalism in the early twentieth century, for exploring the complex relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. In *Dark Princess*, Du Bois demonstrates the complicatedness of forming international coalitions and, through his anti-colonial perspective, shows how nationalism and cosmopolitanism can be combined. The avant-garde film *Borderline* demonstrates how we are all, regardless of our nationality, responsible for racism. In *Giovanni’s Room*, we see how the main character seeks to reconcile American norms with his sexuality, and we see how being an American may bar him from accepting others as human. Since each of my chapters will touch on the relationship of nationalism to cosmopolitanism, I will elaborate on how theorists have debated this relationship in the following section.

**Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism**

One of the greatest debates surrounding cosmopolitanism has been the relationship of cosmopolitanism to nationalism. Some, such as Martha Nussbaum, argue that cosmopolitanism acts as a needed alternative to nationalism and patriotism which can cause one to privilege his/her countrymen over the whole of humanity. In “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” she states, “I believe…that this emphasis on patriotic pride is both morally dangerous, and, ultimately, subversive of some of the worthy goals patriotism sets out to serve…” (4). Nussbaum is cautious about nationalism because of its close relationship to “ethnocentric particularism” (5).
The wars of the twentieth century certainly warrant suspicion of how nationalism can incite racism and violence. This does not mean, though, that Nussbaum completely dismisses local loyalties, rather, she states that we should “think of ourselves not as devoid of local affiliations, but as surrounded by a series of concentric circles” (9). For Nussbaum, the idea is that we should consider ourselves to be members of both a local and global community so that we can see how our own cultural norms are not “neutral or natural” (12) and so that we will have a sense of “moral obligations to the rest of the world” (12).

Others argue that without the particularity that nationalism provides, cosmopolitanism is too abstract a concept to encourage political action or that without a sense of attachment that cosmopolitanism comes to resemble globalization. One of the respondents to Nussbaum’s essay, Richard Falk, states, “Cosmopolitan adherents welcome this outreach beyond the exclusivities of nationalism and statism but find such an expression of solidarity with humanity as a whole too peripheral to achieve an appropriate relocation of ethical orientation” (53). Another respondent, Kwame Anthony Appiah, fearing that cosmopolitanism will become another name for globalization, calls for a “rooted cosmopolitanism” through which the cosmopolitan patriot is “attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different, people” (22). Local communities are, as Appiah states, far more desirable than the world’s “engulfment in a single world-state, a cosmopolis of which we cosmopolitans would be not figurative but literal citizens” (29). Appiah is seeking to avoid the universalizing tendencies of humanism by maintaining a sense and acceptance of differences between peoples and communities. He is also trying to avoid a conflation of cosmopolitanism with globalization or perhaps even with imperialism since his language of “engulfment in a single world-state” is suggestive of empire.

In their introductions to Cosmopolitics, both Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins agree that cosmopolitanism, as it is understood today, is not necessarily antagonistic to nationalism: “…cosmopolitanism sometimes works together with nationalism rather than in opposition to it” (2). Cheah, like Appiah, also seeks to make cosmopolitanism more than an abstraction and to distinguish it from humanism: “Cosmopolitanism is there—not merely an abstract ideal, like loving one’s neighbor as oneself, but habits of thought and feeling that have already shaped and been shaped by particular collectivities, that are socially and geographically situated, hence both limited and empowered” (2). Robbins explains the effect of postcolonial studies on debates about
cosmopolitanism when he states that “the most notable revaluation of the national question in socialism so far has occurred in response to anticolonialist struggles” (29). Nationalism can help to fight imperialism because it can act as a form of “collective solidarity” among the native peoples (29). I will discuss the complications involved in anti-colonial nationalism in more detail in my first chapter on Du Bois’ novel *Dark Princess: A Romance*.

Another concern about the relation of nationalism to cosmopolitanism is that cosmopolitanism should not be reduced to mere internationalism where the nation remains as the sole means of forming political affiliations. Paul Gilroy, in *Postcolonial Melancholia*, warns of the ways in which the term “cosmopolitanism” can be “high jacked.” He explains that it has been used “to refer to the elaboration of a supranational system of regulation that opposes or contains the national state from above” (59). Under this “supranational system” cosmopolitanism is still dependent on the “national state” as “the primary guarantor of political rights” (63). It is because this “armored cosmopolitanism” resembles imperialism that Gilroy urges the importance of acknowledging the detrimental and “ongoing effects of colonial and imperial governance” (60). Gilroy envisions a cosmopolitanism which would allow us to imagine a common future with others while still acknowledging important local differences, working from the bottom-up rather than from the top-down. He claims that cosmopolitanism’s “value to the politics of mutualism lies in its refusal of state-centeredness and its attractive vernacular style” (67). This vision of cosmopolitanism is shared by other theorists, including Richard Falk, who advocates for what he calls a “neocosmopolitanism” that is “a type of globalization-from-below that is people- (and nature-) oriented and contrasts with globalization-from-above that is capital-driven and ethically neutral” (58).

The texts which I have selected for my study offer interesting insights into this debate over the relationship of nationalism to colonialism. Du Bois’ *Dark Princess*, with its anti-colonial perspective, demonstrates the need for both nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Through Matthew, the main character, Du Bois demonstrates that African Americans may possess the best form of national feeling in that Matthew realizes America’s possibilities but is also aware of its shortcomings. Through Katuliya, an Indian princess, we see that while unity with peoples of other nations is desirable, India’s colonial history dictates that local loyalties must be foremost in one’s mind. In *Borderline*, the film’s non-descript setting allows us to see how the racism of a small town can be generalized to the racism of the Western world; it even shows how national
feeling can give way to racism. Here, the crossing of national boundaries allows us to see that racism is a global issue which is not limited to any one nation. Though the film does single out American forms of racism, it also allows us to see how European nations participate in racism as well. Baldwin’s novella, *Giovanni’s Room*, exemplifies how national mores can impede cosmopolitanism. David’s ability to treat his lover, Giovanni, well is hindered by his own American hang-ups about sexuality. Since each of the texts touches on American nationalism and racism, they may give us a way of understanding how American nationalism, in particular, relates to cosmopolitanism.

**Cosmopolitanism and Modernism**

In *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski states, “…to be modernist is often paradoxically to be antimodern, to define oneself in explicit opposition to the prevailing norms and values of one’s own time” (11). With this concept of modernism in mind, I have chosen to examine texts from the early to mid-twentieth century because modernists’ questioning of national loyalties and social norms goes hand in hand with cosmopolitanism. In the twentieth century, Anderson insists, cosmopolitanism’s advocacy of “reflective distance from one’s cultural affiliations” manifests itself as distance from “those parochialisms emanating from extreme allegiances to nation, race, and ethnos” (267). By becoming expatriates, many of the authors and artists from my chosen texts literally sought distance from these “parochialisms.” Though Du Bois did not become an expatriate until late in life when he moved to Ghana and rescinded his American citizenship, Gilroy explains that he led a “nomadic life,” traveling extensively (*Black Atlantic* 117). Of the contributors to *Borderline*, both H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Paul Robeson were American expatriates. James Baldwin, whose novella is about a white American living abroad, lived as an expatriate in Paris for much of his life. Though I do not think that travel or living in exile necessarily correlate with the development of cosmopolitanism, in the case of these artists, their desire for physical distance from their home country seems to have been caused by their disenchantment with American social morality. It also seems that gaining distance from America and encountering people of other cultures enabled them to better develop and articulate their cosmopolitan thinking in the texts that I have selected. Each of the texts which I discuss responds to these social pressures of “nation, race, and ethnos,” which came to critical heights in the
twentieth century, in that they have a clear agenda of antiracism, antifascism, and/or anti-imperialism.

I look, in particular, at African American modernist texts—though *Borderline* is a collaboration of white and black and British and American modernists—because in my studies I have found that African Americans were among the leaders in developing a cosmopolitan frame of mind in the twentieth century. The foremost example of African American cosmopolitanism is W.E.B. Du Bois, whose work had a profound impact on subsequent African American artists, including Paul Robeson. Tania Friedel, in her book *Racial Discourse and Cosmopolitanism in Twentieth-Century African American Writing*, claims that Du Bois is “the seminal figure” for the study of cosmopolitanism “because he is both part of an existing tradition of cosmopolitan thought in the United States and distinct from that tradition in important ways” by “subverting the idea that African American culture is marginal to mainstream America” (1). Friedel explains that this effort makes Du Bois cosmopolitan because “a cosmopolitan position begins with and values the pluralist belief in the distinctiveness of different cultural groups, supporting and promoting their continuation and inclusion in a larger cultural sphere, yet this is not an endpoint” (2). In Du Bois’ famous *Souls of Black Folk*, as Friedel explains, he argues that the future of African Americans will have a profound affect on the future of the nation. What is incredible about Du Bois, though, is that he does not stop at asserting the rights of African Americans but, through his historical study of racism and colonialism, connects their plight with that of other colonized peoples around the world. In *Souls*, Du Bois asserts, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker and lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (10). As Gilroy explains in *The Black Atlantic*, Du Bois’ conception of the color-line “raises the relationship between nationality and transnational political solidarity” (127). In my study of Du Bois, I examine the development of this early conception of “transnational political solidarity” in his later work *Dark Princess*.

Another way in which Du Bois’ work is important to cosmopolitanism and modernism is through his concept of “double-consciousness.” Gilroy describes double-consciousness as the condition of “occupying the space between” being African and European (or African and American). He later explains that double consciousness is not necessarily limited to being African and European but defines “the special stress that grows with the effort involved in trying to face (at least) two ways at once” (3): “…where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist
discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities are mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or try to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination” (1). In Souls, Du Bois asserts that these two identities are not mutually exclusive but that because American discourse makes them so, the African American has a “second sight” in that he (or she) is aware of his position of double-ness. Gilroy asserts, importantly, that “ideas about nationality, ethnicity, authenticity, and cultural identity are characteristically modern phenomena” (Black Atlantic 2); therefore, the condition of second sight is an essential component of modernism as well.

Double-consciousness is also an important aspect of cosmopolitanism. In Dark Princess, Du Bois expands the concept of double-consciousness to include not only the condition of being American and African American but also the idea of being African American and part of a wider community of “dark” peoples who have been the victims of colonization. Matthew’s double-consciousness is interestingly portrayed as an asset rather than a hindrance. His position as an African American enables him to articulate what is wrong with America, and his new-found consciousness of the dark peoples of the world enables him to see how this larger community can help him in his local struggles. Du Bois’ depiction of double-consciousness very much resembles the notion of multiple loyalties, or “multiple attachments,” which cosmopolitanism articulates and advocates. Multiple loyalties are desirable because they create ways for us to see ourselves as similar to others and give us critical distance from our own culture. In fact, double consciousness is a condition shared by other artists in my study. Robert Tomlinson argues that “Baldwin’s peculiarly African American sense of alienation was double and in some ways parallel to the concept of ‘double-consciousness’ exposed in W.E.B. Du Bois’ Souls of Black Folk” (137). Tomlinson explains that Baldwin felt a double-ness as an American expatriate, “situated on the frontier between two cultures,” and as an African American, “irremediably exiled from [his] African past, yet denied access to the new American culture” (137). In Giovanni’s Room, Baldwin writes of another form of double-consciousness when the character David tries to reconcile being both homosexual and a Caucasian-American. It is also possible that H.D. experienced a kind of double-consciousness as both an American and a woman,

---

2 In her introduction to Cosmopolitan Style, Walkowitz asserts that “critical cosmopolitanism” as a form of criticism typically includes “double consciousness” (2).
3 Pheng Cheah explains in his introduction to Cosmopolitics that “instead of an ideal of detachment, actually existing cosmopolitanism is a reality of [re]attachment, multiple attachments, or attachment at a distance” (3).
4 See Nussbaum’s “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” 9-11.
explaining perhaps her expatriation. Friedman’s argues that H.D.’s encounter with Robeson and work on *Borderline* helped her to articulate her own “‘borderline’ existence” as a woman (107).\(^5\)

Just as modernism often critiques modernity, so can cosmopolitanism. Anderson argues that cosmopolitanism “may provide a resource for the critique of modernity within modernity itself” (272). As I have mentioned earlier, the modernist texts which I have selected react to and often counter the conditions of modernity such as nationalism. Anderson also makes the claim, with which I agree, that a study of cosmopolitanism may “rend[er] reductive oppositions between modernity and countermodernity obsolete by bringing into sharp relief modernity’s own divided histories, and by disallowing any easy identification of modernity with abstract universalism” (266). As my selection of texts suggests, I am working under the assumption that African American literature and women’s literature (that of H.D. and Nancy Cunard) are integral to modernism as a whole. They critique modernism from the inside and are not separate entities all unto themselves.

In conceiving of modernism in this way, I am following the lead of many critics who suggest that we read black and white modernisms together. Cyraina E. Johnson-Roullier, in her reading of *Giovanni’s Room*, states, “We must seek…a mode of understanding that will encourage us, as suggested in the present reading of James Baldwin and African American literature, to open ourselves to the multiplicity of modern experience—the reality and interrelatedness of modernisms…” (950). Annette Debo makes a similar claim in her discussion of *Borderline*, stating, that typically “‘high’ (white and still largely male) modernism remains intact and additional categories are invented in which to include, as well as confine, African-Americans” (371). In contrast, Borderline offers a “challenge to the binaristic view of modernism”: “Borderline bears witness to the interracial nature of modernism in its content, its creation, and its influence” (372). I cite in my chapter on *Borderline* the argument of Sieglinde Lemke, whose study of black and white modern art “trace[s] how both are inextricably related” (3). I also refer to the work of Jane Marcus, who suggests that Nancy Cunard’s work should be given greater consideration because of her role as a political organizer and her status as a bridge figure between black and white modernists.\(^6\)

---

\(^5\) I discuss Friedman’s argument in greater detail in my second chapter.

\(^6\) See Sieglinde Lemke’s *Primitivist Modernism* (3) and Jane Marcus’ *Hearts of Darkness* (123). Annette Debo cites these two critics as leaders among those who suggest the interrelation of black and white modernism in “Interracial Modernism in Avant-Garde Film,” 371-2.
My inclusion of *Borderline* and, as a point of comparison, Nancy Cunard’s essay “Black Man and White Ladyship” allows me to discuss an aspect of modernism which is not often thought of in conjunction with cosmopolitanism—modernist primitivism. The white modernists of *Borderline* and Cunard participated in primitivism in that they, along with many other modernists, were fascinated with African (and African American) art and frequented Harlem. The use of primitivist discourse is apparent in *Borderline* and Cunard’s work in that black people are aligned with nature and a “privileged gaze” is evident. What marks these artists’ work as different from other white modernists,’ though, is that they were genuinely interested in raising awareness about racism and in working in collaboration with African American modernists. In my examination of *Borderline*, I argue that the film demonstrates a cosmopolitan view of racism in that it shows how the “colorline” is evident in all aspects of social life and crosses national boundaries. Despite the fact that many feminists were not anti-colonialists or anti-racists at this time, *Borderline* and Cunard’s essay examine how the social pressures which force women into constricting gender roles also dictate the rules of racial identity; they recognize that, as I will explain in the next section, discourses about gender, sexuality, and race had a clear influence upon one another.

**Putting the Pieces Together: The Politics of Identity**

Through writing my thesis, I have discovered that an important component of cosmopolitanism for modernist writers is a challenge to all naturalized conceptions of identity—including nationality, race, gender, and sexuality—and a conception of how these aspects of identity affect one another. As theorists such as Robyn Wiegman and Siobhan B. Somerville assert, various forms of identity, including race and sexuality, were articulated through each other in the twentieth century. Wiegman asserts that starting with the advent of race science in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth century, that comparative anatomy created a series of analogies between blackness and other kinds of seemingly visible bodily differences. Through the analogic relationship among differences, in fact, comparative anatomy drew nearly a full range of social hierarchies in the nineteenth century into race’s well-entrenched logic of essential meaning, defining

---

7 Maureen Moynagh argues in her introduction to *Essays on Race and Empire*, that though Cunard did not discuss gender extensively, any connection between feminist ideas and anticolonialism. See pages 12-13.
gender, sexuality, nationality, and class differences as consistent with race’s corporeal distinctions (44).

In *Queering the Colorline*, Somerville also makes an argument for how race and sexuality relate, stating, “negotiations of the colorline…shaped and were shaped by the emergence of notions of sexual identity and the corresponding epistemological uncertainties surrounding them” (3). She asserts that “the classification of bodies as either ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’ emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively constructing and policing the boundary between ‘black and white’ bodies” (3).

The texts that I have selected for my thesis all demonstrate Wiegman’s and Somerville’s claims that various forms of identity are interrelated in the twentieth-century. Interestingly, each text deals with the taboos (and sometimes regulations) surrounding romantic relationships, such as rules against miscegenation and homosexuality. They each show how one’s race and national identity govern and are governed by rules about gender and sexuality. I read their stories about the complications involved in romantic partnerships as a metaphor for the difficulties of international and intercultural coalitions. Rita Felski’s statement that for women modernists “[t]he so-called private sphere…is shown to be radically implicated in patterns of modernization and processes of social change”(3), is also true of the novels of the African American modernists which I analyze. There is sufficient evidence in each text to suggest that their depiction of romantic relationships are meant to be a comment on the problems of creating bonds across cultural boundaries in the political climate of the twentieth century.

In *Dark Princess*, Matthew Townes, an African American, and Katuliya, an Indian princess, overcome the taboos of miscegenation and class differences in order to be together. Their relationship demonstrates how “dark” peoples of the world can help one another since Matthew is selected as Katuliya’s suitor over Indian or English suitors who would try to dominate her and her country. *Borderline* was one of the first films to take on the controversial topic of miscegenation and was banned in the United States because of it until 1978. Through the uproar that occurs in a small town over an interracial affair, the filmmakers demonstrate how racism is based in part on fear about racial mixing and racial impurity. They also show that historically, though white males may be the more frequent perpetrators of miscegenation with black women, black males are frequently the ones who are blamed. In my third and last chapter on *Giovanni’s Room*, I read the homosexual relationship between a white American and an
Italian bartender as demonstrative of love’s possibilities. Though the main character’s, David’s, American homophobia prevents him from continuing the relationship, it does have a lasting impression upon him. By writing David as a white man, the novel demonstrates how whiteness and heterosexuality are interrelated.

Through my readings of these texts, I hope to suggest how certain works of modern literature and film (particularly those that are not typically included in the modernism’s canon) can illuminate and help us to think through the complications involved in cosmopolitan thinking. They suggest how we can approach the debate about the relationship of nationalism to cosmopolitanism, how in certain contexts the combination is necessary and how in others national mores can act as a hindrance to cosmopolitanism. They suggest as well that cosmopolitan thinking frequently requires understanding how various forms of identity—race, gender, sexuality, and nationality—are articulated through each other and are dependent upon cultural norms. I do not, however, mean to imply that there is one approach to cosmopolitanism. The texts that I have selected suggest the various ways in which one can create bonds across boundaries. Du Bois uses his position as an African American and understanding of colonial history to write his cosmopolitan utopia. Both the creators Borderline and Baldwin are guided by an understanding of how alternative sexualities and racial differences are oppressed by society.
As I mention in my introduction, much of the debate surrounding the usefulness of cosmopolitanism has been about its relation to nationalism. Today, postcolonial studies have caused some theorists, such as Cheah, to acknowledge that nationalism and cosmopolitanism are not necessarily antithetical; anti-colonial nationalism can be used to create solidarity among colonized subjects. Though nationalism does offer a sense of identity from which colonized peoples may draw the strength for rebellion against their colonizers, a concern of some critics is that this anti-colonial nationalism then becomes simply an imitation of imperialism, which is founded on nationalism. Leela Gandhi explains this paradox in saying,

> It is generally agreed that nation-ness and nationalism are European inventions which came into existence toward the end of the eighteenth century. Anderson, among others, persuasively argues that this newly contrived European nation-ness immediately acquired a ‘modular’ character which rendered it capable of dissemination and transplantation in a variety of disparate terrains. (113)

It is nationalism that bolstered empire because national identity could then be spread and generalized to places all over the world. It is for this reason that even Franz Fanon, who saw nationalism as a source of anti-colonial sentiment, was “ambivalent about the postcolonial nation-State” (Gandhi 111). Gandhi refutes Anderson’s argument, though, by pointing out Anderson’s refusal to consider different kinds of nationalisms; the nationalism that the postcolonial state adopts does not have to be a parroting of Western nationalism. Gandhi goes on to explain that we should not conflate “the people-who-comprise-the-nation and the State-which-represents-the-nation” for it is among the people that the rebellion may live on despite the State apparatus: “Thus, rather than being simply ‘derivative,’ the insurgent moment of anti-colonial nationalism not only contradicts the pre-eminence of the State, but it also furnishes its dissent through the autonomous political imagination of the people-who-comprise-the-nation” (120).

W.E.B. Du Bois’ 1928 novel *Dark Princess: A Romance* can provide us with a useful way to think through the relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, particularly in an anti-colonial context. Other critics, such as Homi K. Bhabha and Paul Gilroy, have commented on the novel’s value as a cosmopolitan text. Bhabha, in his 2007 introduction to the novel, remarks that the “novel addresses a globalizing world with caution and wisdom” by demonstrating how there
must be a balance of ‘common’ interest and cultural differences: “As transnationalist aspirations collide with traditionalist customs and beliefs, Du Bois teaches us that we must not ignore the trials and tribulations of transition...that have to be endured before the globe can make itself present to us as a world of beauty and fairness” (xxxi). As Bhabha aptly notes, much of the novel’s plot is devoted to the process of creating transnational coalitions which involves the difficult negotiation of loyalties and encounter with racism. Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic,* also notes how Du Bois is able to bring cultures together while still maintaining differences. Gilroy writes about the ending of the novel that it “offers an image of hybridity and intermixture that is especially valuable because it gives no ground the suggestion that cultural fusion involves betrayal, loss, corruption, or dilution” (144). Both Bhabha and Gilroy also note that Du Bois’ conception of difference within unity was inspired by his study of anti-colonialism, including his admiration of Gandhi and his friendship with Lajpat Rai, an Indian Nationalist. Through this anti-colonial perspective, Du Bois demonstrates how one can retain a connection to his/her native land and people while at the same time considering how one’s troubles are connected to world issues.

While I am in agreement with both Bhabha and Gilroy, I would like to make a more detailed study of how Du Bois negotiates between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. For though Bhabha states that *Dark Princess* is an example of Du Bois’ turn toward internationalism in contrast to the nationalism of *Souls of Black Folk,* I believe that nationalism is still important to Du Bois conception of cosmopolitanism in *Dark Princess.* After all, the anti-colonial movements which Du Bois studied frequently turned to nationalism in order to unite native peoples against their colonial oppressors. At the same time, Du Bois rejects the extreme patriotism, ethnocentrism, and violence which can result from nationalism. In my analysis of the novel, I would like to focus on the moments in *Dark Princess* where Du Bois seems to be negotiating between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, between loyalties to home and loyalties to humanity. Through Matthew and the “dark princess,” Kautilya’s, experiences trying to form a world-coalition of “dark” peoples, we see how they must turn from nationalism to cosmopolitanism and back again in order to fight injustice and imperialism.

---

8 Bhabha states, “In this odd coupling of cultures and geographies, the celebrated ‘twoness’ of Du Bois’s dialectical concept of double-consciousness—at once, within a single soul, an American and a Negro caught in the ‘contradiction of double aims’—seems to lose its predominantly national mooring” (xxv).
Du Bois exhibits how both unity and cultural differences (transnationalism and nationalism) must be kept in balance through the romantic relationship between Matthew and Katuliya. In addition to Du Bois’ use of the genre of romance to create a utopian vision I will argue that he also uses romance, as in romantic relationships, as a metaphor for international and intercultural unions. Du Bois uses and re-writes the trope of romance in order to demonstrate the kind of relationship, one founded on mutual respect and equality, which is necessary for international coalitions to be successful. Matthew and Katuliya are able to overcome barriers of ethnicity, class, and even those of gender norms, together and their relationship turns out to be the best option for both of themselves and their dream of uniting the dark peoples of the world. My reading of the novel proposes that we reexamine the portion of the books title which falls after the colon, *Dark Princess: A Romance*. Du Bois’ would have been aware of how the romantic plots of novels and films, particularly those that exploited the taboo of miscegenation, were frequently used to boost nationalist and racist feeling. Du Bois speaks of the hypocrisy of the claim that black men are a threat to white women in *Souls*. He also openly protested the novel *The Clansman* and the subsequent film based on the novel, *Birth of a Nation*—a film which uses the fear of miscegenation to justify violence against African Americans—in *The Crisis* and, along with the N.A.A.C.P., attempted to have it banned. In *Dark Princess*, he purposefully deconstructs the typical romance plot by having Matthew defend the dark princess against a white American and then by having the princess defend herself, suggesting a more powerful position for women than romance plots typically allowed. My reading also suggests that Du Bois expanded his idea of who could be a race leader in *Souls of Black Folk*—which has been widely criticized for being male-centered—to include women in *Dark Princess*.

**Matthew as American Cosmopolitan**

In the first section of *Dark Princess*, Du Bois seems anxious to assert the right of African Americans to join the ranks of the international community. At the start of the novel, Matthew, a gifted medical student, is on route to Germany. Matthew is leaving the U.S. after having been

---

9 In *Souls*, Du Bois states, “And if in just fury you accuse their vagabonds of violating women, they also in fury quite as may reply: The rape which your gentlemen have done against helpless black women in defiance of own laws is written on the foreheads of two millions of mulattoes, and written in ineffaceable blood” (“Of the Training of Black Men” 79).

10 As one example of this protest, see “The Clansman” from *The Crisis* (May 1915):33.

11 One example of such criticism is Hazel Carby’s chapter “The Souls of Black Men” from *Race Men*, which I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter.
prevented from advancing in his program for racist reasons; it is assumed that white, female patients will not want a black obstetrician. While touring Berlin, Matthew meets a beautiful, dark woman who we later learn is an Indian princess and the last remaining heir to the throne of Bwodpur—a kingdom of India invented by Du Bois. After defending the princess against the advances and racist comments of a white American male, the princess, Katuliya, asks Matthew to join her and representatives from various countries in a dinner discussion of how to form an international coalition of dark peoples and the role of the American “Negro” in such a venture. Though Matthew enjoys the dinner and the Princess’ presence immensely, he finds himself out of place when the cosmopolitan group discusses Modern art. His status as an American and an African American mean that his foreign language skills are poor and his knowledge of high culture is inept. He also becomes uncomfortable when he learns that many of the cosmopolitans, a Japanese representative especially, doubt the ability of American Negroes to take political action and join their coalition.

We soon learn exactly what role Du Bois plans for African Americans to play in this international movement. Matthew is able to assert his knowledge on the subjects of racism and oppression. In their discussion of who should relieve the oppression of the dark peoples, a Japanese man asserts, “Who can do it but those superior races whose necks now bear the yoke of the inferior rabble of Europe?” (16). He claims that the darker peoples are the “natural aristocracy” because they “count [their] millenniums of history where Europe counts her centuries” (18). The Japanese man’s argument allows Du Bois to establish the history of the darker peoples’ culture as equal to if not superior to European culture, which as Amy Kaplan suggests is an alternative to the “imperial maps and narratives of the world” (171). At the same time, Matthew’s identification of the Japanese’s rhetoric with that of his white American oppressors exposes its similarity to the scientific racism that was used to justify both slavery and imperialism:

It started on lines so familiar to Matthew that he had to shut his eyes and stare again at their swarthy faces: Superior races—the right to rule—born to command—inferior breeds—the lower classes—the rabble….But how humorous it was to Matthew to see all tables turned; the rabble now was the white workers of Europe; the inferior races were the ruling whites of Europe and America (18).
The Japanese man’s use of the words “superior races” and “inferior breeds” demonstrates his reliance on the logic of scientific racism which held that certain races were inferior to others. Stating that “always blood must tell,” the Japanese (he has no other name) also demonstrates scientific racism’s fear of racial degeneration when he questions the ability of African Americans because he sees them as impure products of miscegenation. Matthew then sees the “color line within the color line, a prejudice within prejudice, and he and his again the sacrifice” (16). The “darkest of the darker peoples” are not considered worthy world leaders. Du Bois demonstrates that “…the entrenched discourse of cultural essentialism merely reiterates and gives legitimacy to the insidious racialisation of thought which attends the violent logic of colonial rationality” (Gandhi 123).

Matthew’s response to this colonial rationality clearly echoes Du Bois’ notion of the “talented Tenth” from Souls: “And suppose we found that ability and talent and art is not entirely or even mainly among the reigning aristocrats of Asia and Europe, but buried among millions of men down in the great sodden masses of all men and even in Black Africa?” (18). Matthew is not opposed to an aristocracy, but rather against an essentialist aristocracy. He champions a meritocracy whose leaders would include those from among the “rabble.” Matthew’s rhetoric of a meritocracy clearly reflects American ideals. He states, “America is teaching the world one thing and only one thing of real value, and that is, that ability and capacity for culture is not the hereditary monopoly of a few, but the widespread possibility for the majority of mankind if they only have a decent chance in life” (19). While Matthew does say that this equality of opportunity is the “one thing and only one thing of real value” that America has to offer the world, it seems that it is Matthew’s status as an American and as an African American which allow him to counter the Japanese man’s argument for a “hereditary monopoly.” Du Bois does not dismiss American potential entirely but seeks to draw the best from America by turning to those who are in a position to object to see its possibilities and its shortcomings—African Americans. In this way, Du Bois is able to demonstrate his claim in Souls that African Americans can offer the world another perspective: “Herein the longing of

---

12 The editors of the 1997 Bedford edition of Souls of Black Folk, David W. Blight and Robert Gooding-Williams, define Du Bois’ notion of the “Talented Tenth,” or the “Thinking classes,” as “the idea that an educated black elite (10 percent) ought to lead and provide an uplifting example for the masses of the race.” They report that “he first formally named this concept in ‘Of the Training of Black Men,’ Atlantic Monthly 90 (September 1902): 296, which he revised as chapter 6 of Souls” (note 26, 204).
black men must have respect: the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange rendings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts” (80). By having Matthew sing an American slave spiritual for the cosmopolitans, he proves that those who come out of the depths can produce great art, can turn their hardships into art, and that African Americans, particularly intelligent ones such as Matthew, might have something to offer this union of dark peoples after all.

In defense of African Americans, Katuliya explains that during her visit to Moscow (clearly a Socialist allusion) she heard that African Americans “have forged their unaltering way upward. If the report is true, they are a nation today, a modern nation worthy to stand beside any nation here” (16). African Americans, a “nation within a nation,” are allowed the status of nationhood which is important because it grants them a collective identity. It is well documented that Du Bois thought of African Americans as colonized subjects and believed that India’s independence movement provided an apt example for African Americans to follow. In granting them nationhood, he restores the identity which the colonizer denies them. As Frantz Fanon states in The Wretched of the Earth, “Every effort is made [by the colonizers] to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture…, to recognize the unreality of his ‘nation,’ and, in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure” (236). For African Americans, whose origins have been obscured by the slave trade, it seems that a national identity is essential.

Though Fanon was leery of nationalism, he did grant that “[n]ational consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension” (247). In calling African Americans a “nation,” Katuliya allows them the ability to participate in her international coalition. At the same time, naming them a “nation” when they do not have the official status of a nation shows that an official status as a nation is not needed for participation in internationalism. Rather, some form of collective identity is needed. In Postcolonial Melancholia, Paul Gilroy champions, as examples of cosmopolitanism, those movements which

13 For more about Du Bois’ views on Negro spirituals, see Chapter 14 of Souls, “Of the Sorrow Songs” (185-196).
14 For more information on Du Bois turn to Asia and India in particular as examples of anti-colonial rebellion, see Dohra Ahmad’s “‘More than Romance’: Genre and Geography in Dark Princess,” positions 11:1 (2003) and Bill V. Mullen’s “Du Bois, Dark Princess, and the Afro-Asian International,” ELH 69 (2002) 775-803.
15 See Fanon’s chapter “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” from The Wretched of the Earth, 148-205. See also Leela Gandhi’s discussion of Fanon’s thoughts on nationalism in her chapter “Imagining Community” from Postcolonial Theory 110-113.
“pursued forms of internationalism that went beyond any simple commitment to the interlocking system of national states and markets” (5). In naming African Americans as a “nation within a nation” Du Bois affords African Americans the status of a nation which can act independently of the State apparatus and interact with other oppressed peoples of the world.

In granting African Americans nationhood, Du Bois redefines nationhood by separating “the people-who-comprise-the-nation” from “the State-which-represents-the-nation” (Gandhi 120). It may be that Du Bois derived this alternate concept of nationhood from his study of anti-colonial nationalism. Though Benedict Anderson has argued that anti-colonial nationalism is simply a return to the vehicle, nationalism, which allows for the spread of imperialism in the first place, Leela Gandhi argues that the nationalism that the postcolonial state adopts does not have to be a parroting of Western nationalism. Gandhi explains that we should not conflate “the people-who-comprise-the-nation and the State-which-represents-the-nation” for it is among the people that the rebellion may live on despite the State apparatus: “Thus, rather than being simply ‘derivative,’ the insurgent moment of anti-colonial nationalism not only contradicts the pre-eminence of the State, but it also furnishes its dissent through the autonomous political imagination of the people-who-comprise-the-nation” (120). The notion that the people within the nation can act as an “autonomous political imagination” would have been particularly important to African Americans who, like colonial subjects, had their rights denied by the State apparatus.

It is important to note, however, that this complex idea of what constitutes nationhood is applied only to African Americans. The other characters at the dinner reflect monolithic and stereotypical concepts of their nations. The Japanese leader in particular is portrayed as a racist and elitist, the Indian men are portrayed as cowardly and reliant on notions of the Indian caste system, and the Arab man is silent and brooding throughout the entire dinner. The possibility of

---

16 Gandhi explains that some critics believe that anti-colonial nationalism just becomes an imitation of European nationalism: “It is generally agreed that nation-ness and nationalism are European inventions which came into existence toward the end of the eighteenth century. Anderson, among others, persuasively argues that this newly contrived European nation-ness immediately acquired a ‘modular’ character which rendered it capable of dissemination and transplantation in a variety of disparate terrains” (113).

17 Homi Bhabha in his introduction to Dark Princess explains that Du Bois also respected the Japanese in a way that is not reflected in his depiction of them in the novel: “At that time, the Japanese were deeply sympathetic to the plight of African Americans, and Du Bois respected their political sovereignty and admired the Japanese ability to be masters of modernization without losing their distinctive cultural traits and traditions to an ever-expanding Westernization” (“Introduction” xxvii). This respect may be the reason that the Japanese ultimately comes over to the princess’ side in the novel; she suggests that Japan should be the leader of the dark peoples.
nations within nations or differences of opinion among peoples of the same nation is not represented for the nations that these characters represent. In portraying the Japanese as he does, though, he may be making a statement against nationalism. Bill V. Mullen suggests that the “racial and national enmity” expressed by the Japanese and other characters may be “reflective of Du Bois’s ambivalence in 1927 about Japan’s rising national ambitions” (226). Also, it is important to remember that the strife among these characters and their conflict with Matthew is meant to demonstrate the complications involved in forming international coalitions. As Homi Bhabha explains in his 2007 introduction to the novel, “These fictional inversions and diversions from historical fact provide Du Bois with an opportunity to explore the complexities and contradictions of global solidarity—the risks and ruses that exist within the revolutionary groups who claim to represent the wretched of the earth” (xxvii). It seems that Du Bois does not want to exclude even cosmopolitans from the possibility that, as Bhabha says, “the demons of cultural prejudice, racial fantasies, and social anxieties” may corrode their otherwise enlightened thoughts (xxvii).

Another moment where Du Bois seems to forget the importance of particularity is in his depiction (or lack of depiction) of Africa. Despite Du Bois’ clear consciousness of the differences between African Americans and the white American hegemony, he does not seem to consider the differences between Africans and African Americans. Du Bois assumes that African Americans are suitable representatives for both groups, probably because he sought to unite African Americans with Africans in his historical work. Despite his good intentions, Du Bois fails to consider the particularities and therefore risks imitating the United States’ imperialist attitude toward Africa. Amy Kaplan explains that while Du Bois critiques nationalism as “not only the cause of empire but also as its consequence” in his work, that he also, at times, “enlist[s] the exceptionalist logic of American imperialism,” particularly in his discussions of Africa (175). Kaplan’s analysis of Du Bois’ 1898 speech as having a “double-edged effect” seems also to apply to the first section of *Dark Princess*. By including African Americans as part of this international coalition, Du Bois, “decenters the U.S. ‘race question’ as part of a global imperial context” but in having Matthew represent both Africans and African Americans, he “centers ‘we black men of America’ as leaders of the darker world, for which the United States serves as a model” (177).
Du Bois may redeem himself, though, in a later scene which seems to undermine Matthew’s idea of America as savior to the world. After the dinner, Matthew tries to defend the princess against a conspiracy of the Japanese man, an Arab man, and two Indian men. Disliking Matthew’s infiltration into their society and fearing miscegenation (they note the way Matthew was looking at the princess), these three men approach Matthew in order to take the letter which the Princess has asked Matthew to deliver to America. In a brave show of loyalty to the princess, Matthew faces the men, outnumbered, and considers his options. Matthew’s heroism is interesting because, first of all, it is a reversal of the typical damsel-in-distress narrative in that Matthew seeks to protect the princess’ power and right to decide for herself. It is the others, the Indians in particular, who are seeking to defend her purity and rank. Secondly, Matthew’s plans for action are all, curiously, moves from American sports. In an almost humorous description, Matthew thinks of first doing “a first-base slide and spike” into the Japanese man’s ankles and then trying a “football tackle on the Arab” (22-3). Exalted, Matthew thinks, “…to die for the Princess—silly, of course, but it made his blood race. For the first time he glimpsed the glory of death” (23). Rather than defend her to the death, though, Matthew “parrie[s]” with words, stalling the intruders as long as he can. He is then rescued by the Princess when she enters the room and states, “…the Princess will decide” (24). It seems, after all, that the Princess does not need Matthew nor anyone else to, as the others say, “rescue her Royal Highness from herself” (24). I would like to suggest that this scene champions Matthew’s defense of the Princess’ feminism while at the same time undermining his American heroism and nationalism. Though Matthew is allowed to assert his heroism when rescuing the princess from a white American, it seems that this heroism is not welcome nor needed when the princess is dealing with her own people.

Monica L. Miller’s article “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Dandy as Diasporic Race Man” offers a useful description of what Du Bois may be saying about the relationship between masculinity and nationalism here. Miller explains that Du Bois, in his speech “Jefferson Davis as Representative of Civilization,” genders black civilization as feminine and an “‘imperious’ Teutonic civilization” as masculine. It is Du Bois idea to unite the “Teutonic ‘Strong Man,’” whose “mentality of a soldier and lover…in excess, has the potential to be a dangerous example

---

18 Though Katuliya is shown to be a powerful and independent woman in this context, her power is more questionable at the end when she gives birth to a son who will replace her as heir to the throne. Source?
of ‘Individualism coupled with the rule of might’ (811)” (740), with the “Negro ‘Submissive Man’” (740). Du Bois relates this Strong Man mentality to Western nationalism: “‘…through the glamour of history, the rise of a nation has ever been typified by the Strong Man crushing out an effete civilization’” (740). Miller explains that Du Bois seeks to re-write American national culture by using the “Submissive Man” to temper the “Strong Man.” In my reading of the awkward rescue scene from Dark Princess, I believe that Du Bois may be suggesting that the Strong Man approach is also not appropriate for international relations. Du Bois was against the U.S. invasion of Haiti because he believed that it simply perpetuated the logic of imperialism. As Amy Kaplan explains, “…he refuted the rationale that internal chaos within Haiti warranted outside intervention” (172). Matthew’s American attempt to rescue the princess, though noble, is not needed when the princess is dealing with disputes among her own people. Du Bois seems very much aware of the dangers of nationalism poses for cosmopolitanism; therefore, Matthew’s nationalism is checked when it comes to resemble the “Strong Man” mentality.

The Marriage of Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism

This balancing of international and national loyalties is seen again when Katuliya discusses English interference in her native land of Bwodpur. In the final section of the novel, after Matthew has found both violence and politics to be ineffective in creating social change, he and Katuliya are again together and she convinces him of the necessity of joining her in her vision of solidarity among the darker peoples of the world. In order to illustrate the need for this coalition, Katuliya tells Matthew about India. She describes India as holding the history and future of the world: “‘India! India! Out of black India the world was born. Into the black womb of India the world shall creep to die. All that the world has done, India did, and that more marvelously, more magnificently….Man is there of every shape and kind and hue…”” (164). She then goes on to explain that this promising land is under British imperial control: “The shame, that the vast center of human life should be but the daubed footstool of a stodgy island of shopkeepers born with seas and hearts of ice” (165). Katuliya’s subsequent narratives tell about her country’s and her own relationship with Britain and her eventual rebellion against the English.

Other critics have commented on Du Bois use of romance in the novel, particularly in his description of India and at the end of the book. Dohra Ahmad claims that Du Bois uses the genre
of romance to write about India and that, within the novel, India “is no material realm but rather a field of associations and symbolisms” (785). Indeed, in Katuliya’s description of India it is figured as a multi-cultural, dream-like place which is instilled with mystery. Ahmad explains that this Orientalist view of India stands in stark contrast to the detailed realism with which Du Bois describes Chicago and New York earlier in the novel. This mystery surrounding India and lack of historical specificity, Ahmad demonstrates, allows it to be representative of “the world’s foremost possibility for anticolonial liberation, and one of the most valuable models for African-Americans” (785); it contains a utopian possibility that the realist cities of North America do not. Bhabha seconds this argument about Du Bois’ use of romance in stating, “His use of…the conventions of romance—symbolism, allegory, magical coincidence—allows him to explore the world of fantasy and desire: the unconscious ambivalences and unresolved strivings and yearnings of the race-man who is committed to his people and striving for a larger, more international community of culturally diverse comrades” (xxvii). Of course, in using his romantic and Orientalist portrait of India to oppose the conditions of modernity that oppress African Americans, Du Bois falls into the trap of simplifying the Other in order to further his own aims.

Du Bois portrays India’s difficult position as a colonized nation through Katuliya’s failed betroths. Both her first betrothal to a prince of Sindrabad and to an English war veteran turn out to be ways for England to try to gain control over her native Bwodpur. In having Katuliya instead decide to marry Matthew, a poor African American, Du Bois is able to rewrite the story of a white man saving a dark woman—which Amy Kaplan explains was a typical imperialist fantasy of late nineteenth century American romance novels—as two dark people saving one another in this final section of the novel. Rather than be controlled by or dependent on England, Bwodpur is able to maintain its independence through a coalition with other dark peoples of the world. The romance between Matthew and Katuliya represents the possibility of a coalition of the dark peoples of the world and the culmination of this romance in the woods of Virginia combines provincialism and internationalism in a way which acknowledges the need for the particular in any cosmopolitan project.

---

19 Ahmad states, “Dark Princess places India at the core of a worldwide anticolonial movement; accordingly the language of Orientalism, and it attendant imagery of wealth, luxury, and spice, oppose the machine that is Chicago” (783).

20 See Kaplan’s chapter “Romancing the Empire,” from The Anarchy of Empire, particularly page 105. Gayatri Spivak remarks that “White men are saving brown women from brown men” is a trope within colonial reasoning in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (2204).
India’s colonial relationship to Britain is represented through Katuliya’s various romantic relationships. Her first betrothal to a prince of Sindrabad, a neighboring kingdom, is suspiciously allowed by the English, who the people call “Fingies,” because, as the princess later learns, they had wished to gain more control over Bwodpur “a native, half-independent Indian state” through the marriage. Sindrabad itself is more-controlled by the English, with the prince having a so-called English advisor who spies on him. Before the princess can marry this prince, though, the princess’ fiancé is killed and the princess herself is taken to England for fear that she will be killed as well. This betrothal seems to symbolize the failure of coalitions among the tribes of India to resist English rule because certain tribes have already been infiltrated by the English to such an extent.

The next of Katuliya’s romances is with England itself. During her stay, Katuliya comes to love England and its people because they treat her so well. This treatment, Katuliya later learns, is simply an English conspiracy to keep the princess in England as long as possible because they fear that the princess “might become a rallying center for independence” back in India (167). Katuliya explains that at this point in time she was “dazed and blinded by the Great White World” (168). She later starts to recover from this blindness when she is first called a traitor by a poor Indian tribesman who she encounters in France and then later sees black men dying for white civilization when she works as a Red Cross volunteer. After the Armistice, though, Katuliya says that she was “ready to forgive England and Europe. They were but masses of shortsighted fallible men, like all of us. We had all slept. Now the world was awake” (170).

With this rather humanist statement, Katuliya comes to see herself as English and imagines a “New India, a proud and free nation in the great free sisterhood of the British Raj” (170). Interestingly, Katuliya’s vision of equality prevents her from realizing that while she may see herself as an equal, the English do not. Next, Katuliya meets a wounded English officer. She describes him in romantic language: “He was my knight in shining armor: tall, spare, and fair, with cool gray eyes, his arm in a sling, his khaki smooth and immaculate, his long limbs golden-booted and silver-spurred” (171). Just as Matthew’s attempt at heroism turned out to be a farce, so does Katuliya’s “knight in shining armor.” The spell is broken when Katuliya overhears that her English fiancé is only interested in her because it will be a way for England to gain control over Bwodpur, a “powerful buffer state” which will allow them access to China. Katuliya learns that he does not think of her as an equal but rather sees marrying a “darky” as the only way for
“a poor and crippled younger son” to serve England and help to spread the empire (173). Learning that her betrothed is not a “knight in shining armor” after all, Katuliya decides that she must return to Bwodpur and joins the Indian liberation movement.

The fact that Katuliya’s forgiveness of England nearly leads to England gaining control over her country, reveals the impossibility of colonized nations having any sort of a union with imperial countries. Historically, this moment in the text demonstrates a refusal of the idea of partial self-rule which many colonized nations, including India, were considering at the time. It may also, demonstrate, though, the dangers of taking humanism too far. Katuliya’s readiness to unite with England certainly reflects a humanist attitude in that she sees all people as equal and is willing to forgive the faults of others. Du Bois seems to be pointing out the shift that can occur between humanism and imperialism in that it is possible for imperialism to disguise itself as a humanistic enterprise. Katuliya’s marriage to the officer is proposed as a union of equal nations but then turns out to be a cover-up for imperialism. Katuliya’s return to India and decision to side with the Indian liberation movement shows that Indian nationalism is necessary to anti-colonialism. It also makes a case for the importance of historical considerations and local loyalties to cosmopolitanism; if we are to avoid the “world-state” against which Appiah warns, then a combination of the universalism and particular differences is essential.

It seems that pure nationalism is not the solution either. Katuliya’s attempt to rule India herself is troubled, though, by various factions within India and by the fact that she is a woman. The Swaraj, who represent young India and rebellion against England, dislike all royalty and so distrust Katuliya. Katuliya describes them as “fierce, young, insurgent souls irreverent toward royalty and white Europe, preaching independence and self-rule for India….I sensed in them revolution—the change long due in Asia” (175). Though the spirit of the Swaraj is what India needs for revolution, their methods are not the best. Katuliya learns that it is probably this group who was responsible for the murder of her first fiancé (though she thinks they were probably encouraged by Englishmen). Since violent rebellion has been dismissed as a viable source of social change earlier in the novel, the Swaraj are not likely to hold the answer to India’s problems. Their violent nationalism may well become destructive in the future. Gandhi quotes Dharampal in order to illustrate how nationalism can come to work against the anti-colonial nation: “Tragically, as Dharampal points out, so long as the postcolonial State retains the certifiably colonial belief in an infallible State structure: ‘It not only keeps intact the distrustful,
hostile and alien stances of the state-system vis a vis the people but also makes the latter feel that it is violence alone which enables them to be heard’ (Dharampal 1971, p.lx)” (120).

In addition to this rebellious force, Katuliya also encounters problems with other factions of India. Being a woman, Katuliya must marry and produce a male heir in order to secure the future of her country. Her possible suitors, though, are not very appealing options. Katuliya describes them: “Two suitors for my hand and power came forward—a fierce and ugly old rajah from the hills who represented the Indians’ determination for self-rule under the form of monarchy, and a handsome devil from the lowlands, tool and ape of England: I hated them both” (175). Katuliya’s rejection of the old rajah who wants to uphold monarchy demonstrates Du Bois belief that systemic, socialist changes must be made in order for India’s independence to succeed. In addition to the several socialist references within the novel, one of the changes that Katuliya makes in India is to more equally spread welfare. Her rejection of the other man, the “tool and ape of England,” shows that just as Katuliya cannot trust her English fiancé, she also cannot trust Indians who favor England.

Instead of sticking with the ideas of her own country, Katuliya decides to study other dark peoples of the world in order to learn from them, which leads to her meeting with Matthew in Berlin. Rather than a union with old India, new India or English India, Du Bois suggests by her union with Matthew that an allegiance with the dark, oppressed people of other nations will be the best solution for India’s future. Such a coalition is also shown to be the best option for African Americans in that Matthew is lost without Katuliya. In the second and third sections of the novel, during which Matthew is in America and he is apart from Katuliya, Matthew encounters only the options of violence or political greed. It is Katuliya who keeps him from committing violence when, after a lynching of one of his fellow Pullman workers and a failed attempt at a strike, he nearly allows Perigua, a Philippine friend of his, to blow up a train full of Ku Klux Klan members. Matthew is ready to sacrifice himself in the explosion until he realizes that Katualiya is on the train and so decides to notify the conductor of the impending danger. Also, Katuliya later saves him from his marriage to Sara Andrews, who gets him into a political career and then forces him to make dishonest political moves in order to gain power and money. The black politicians of Chicago are shown to be just as corrupt as the white politicians of Washington. Finally, Katuliya saves him, after their reunion, from apathy by insisting that they must return to their work of uniting the dark peoples of the world despite Matthew’s resistance.
The book ends in Matthew’s childhood home in the woods of Virginia. It is here that Katuliya has given birth to Matthew’s son, without Matthew’s knowledge, and they later meet to be married in a spiritual marriage which combines references to multiple religions and the traditions of both Asia and Africa. Their son, as the future Maharajah of Bwodpur, represents the union of Asia, represented by Katuliya, and Africa, represented by Matthew’s mother. Paul Gilroy states that the ending of *Dark Princess* …offers an image or hybridity and intermixture that is especially valuable because it gives no ground to the suggestion that cultural fusion involves betrayal, loss, corruption, or dilution. The startling portrait of procreation—cultural formation and transformation—is constructed so that the integrity of both its tributaries remains uncompromised by their confluence. This is not the fusion of two purified essences but rather a meeting of two heterogeneous multiplicities that in yielding themselves up to each other create something durable and entirely appropriate to troubled anti-colonial times (144). Katuliya and Matthew’s son, as Gilroy claims, represents a hybrid union in which one side does not dominate the other, distinguishing their relationship from Katuliya’s other possible matches. Though it is true that Katuliya’s role as mother in the end removes her from her position of power and that it is her son’s gender which will allow him to inherit her kingdom, the inclusion of a woman at all in this cosmopolitan project is a step forward for Du Bois. Hazel Carby, in describing Du Bois’ “gender-specific” conception of race leadership, explains that Du Bois often deemphasizes the role of women in creating the next generation in his writing: “The map of intellectual mentors he draws for us is a map of male production and reproduction that traces in its form, but displaces through its content, biological and sexual reproduction. It is reproduction without women…” (25). In contrast, the ending of *Dark Princess* speaks to the integral role of Katuliya in both reproduction and in the more symbolic creation of hope for the next generation in that she acts as Matthew’s guide. In the character of Katuliya, Du Bois emphasizes the important role that both women and India must take in the future of African Americans.

**A Place for Cosmopolitanism**

The fact that this hybrid union takes place in the woods of Virginia is worth investigating because the location interestingly combines nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Matthew actually protests Katuliya’s being in the South because of its history of slavery and prejudice, but
Katuliya describes the American South as the ideal place to begin their work to unite the dark peoples of the world because, as she says, “Here is the earth yearning for seed. Here men make food and clothes. We are at the bottom and beginning of things” (200). For Katuliya, going to the bottom has been her own path to world-consciousness. While she and Matthew are apart, she takes servant and labor jobs in order to experience the world as other dark peoples do. It is this journey which convinces her that their revolution should not take place, as Matthew suggests, in the cities. He writes, “Only in the center of the world can our work be done. We must stand, you and I, even if apart, where beats down the fiercest blaze of Western civilization, and pushing back this hell, raise a black world upon it” (201). Katuliya fears, though, that working in the “white cities,” as she calls them, will simply reinforce the hierarchy of industry which already exists. She states, “Just suppose we change our ranking. Suppose in our hearts we rate colored farmers and all discoverers, poets, and dreamers high and even higher and give them space outside of white cities?” (200). The Black Belt, then, is representative of a space where the white industrial monopoly does not exist. It is because this space is devalued by white civilization that it is appealing to Katuliya.

Writing a community that is separate from white industry is a sign of Du Bois anti-imperialism since he saw imperialism and capitalism as deeply intertwined. In “On the Training of Black Men” from Souls, Du Bois claims that both slavery and new imperialism have reduced human beings to the labor that they can produce:

Is not life more than meat, the body more than raiment? And men ask this to-day all the more eagerly because of the sinister signs in recent educational movements. The tendency is here, born of slavery and quickened to renewed life by the crazy imperialism of the day, to regard human beings as among the material resources of a land to be trained with an eye single to future dividends. (70)

Having Katuliya and Matthew found their cosmopolitan project outside the white cities is an effort to step outside of this system of slavery and “the crazy imperialism of today”—global capitalism—and therefore to generate a new value system through which humans will be valued above and beyond the profit that they generate. In 1915, Du Bois wrote an article, “The African Roots of the War,” explaining the repercussions of this de-valuing of human life in that the “new Imperialism”—the use of racism to justify territorial expansion for the sake of wealth—has lead to many wars, including WWI. Du Bois, as Amy Kaplan explains, also saw within “this imperial
crucible of economics and race…not only the roots of war but also the birth of the modern nation” (193). Du Bois believed that competition for “colonial spoils” held together the modern nation. In avoiding the city and white industry, I believe that Du Bois seeks to separate his project from imperialism and to create a bond among the people which does not rely on the exploitation of others as he argued the modern nation did.

Katuliya’s choice of place is also important because it is close to the center of power without actually being in the center. Katuliya believes that their work will best be carried out in America because Asia and Africa are outside the “circle of power” and Europe, as the center of power, will not allow dark people access to it. She suggests America, then, because of its promise of a meritocracy, or what she calls an “oligarchy,” and because “[i]n America your feet are further within the secret circle of that power that half-consciously rules the world. That is the advantage of America. That is the advantage that your people have had. You are working within” (205). Katuliya suggests here that African Americans can take advantage of the fact that they are a nation within a nation that has power but is not the center of the world’s power. The fact that they are located in Virginia is also significant in that it is close to the nation’s center, Washington D.C., without being a part of it.

Du Bois likely claims that the United States is within the center of power but not as much as Europe because of Europe’s vast empires at this point in history. It is important to note, though, that Du Bois did not exclude the United States from participation in imperialism. As I mentioned earlier, Du Bois recognized the new imperialism and saw the United States as taking part in it. Du Bois also commented on the United States participation in more traditional colonialism in the third chapter of Souls, “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others.” In arguing against those “that think the Negro’s only hope lies in emigration beyond the borders of the United States” (39), Du Bois argues that “…nothing has more effectually made this programme seem hopeless than the recent course of the United States toward weaker and darker peoples in the West Indies, Hawaii, and the Philippines,—for where in the world may we go and be safe from lying and brute force?” (39). When Du Bois has Katuliya desire to work from the United States, a country which is part of the circle of power, we can see it as an indictment of the United States history of slavery and imperialism. Of course, the location of this project in America also

---

21 For a discussion of how Du Bois notion of the Talented Tenth proves problematic in Dark Princess, see Bhabha’s 2007 introduction, xxvii.
shows that Du Bois uplift of African Americans is his primary objective, even if it is coupled with cosmopolitanism. Also, Du Bois belief in the possibilities of the American “oligarchy” seems to demonstrate his nationalist pride.

On the other hand, Du Bois does represent within the American South, connections to the world which keep it from isolation. Katuliya writes to Matthew,

“…this world is really much nearer to our world than I had thought…Think, Matthew, take your geography and trace it: from Hampton Roads to Guiana is a world of colored folk, and a world, men tell me, physically beautiful beyond conception; socially enslaved, industrially ruined, spiritually dead; but ready for the breath of Life and Resurrection.

South is Latin America, east is Africa, and east of east lies my own Asia” (200).

Katuliya suggests that the South is representative of “the bottom” of the world and a place where the history of slavery is still apparent. We can see then that though Du Bois’ cosmopolitanism may still be U.S.-centered, that he is again rewriting the meaning of nationalism through this cosmopolitan project. Bhabha explains that in Dark Princess, “Du Bois projects a mode of nationhood that interestingly decenters the ‘state’ by locating it in a region, the Midwest, and localizing it in a city, Chicago, and from there he traces an inter-national routing of the political periphery—the Black Belt” (“The Black Savant” 148). Additionally, it is important to emphasize that the Black Belt is ultimately chosen over Chicago because Katuliya rejects the city in general as a possible site of regeneration both for the nation and for their international coalition. As Ahmad states, “…the move between Northern cities merely continues the frustration of reproductive capacity initiated in Matthew’s exclusion from obstetric rounds” (781). In ending Dark Princess in a subordinate region of the United States with a history of slavery, Du Bois reflects an anti-colonial desire to combine a feeling for home, nationalism, with a cosmopolitanism that operates from the bottom up rather than the top down. In doing so, he echoes “Gandhi’s utopian dream of a decentralized polity” and anticipates “Fanon’s vision of a government ‘for the outcasts and by the outcasts’” (Gandhi 121).

Du Bois’ novel Dark Princess can teach us much about the relationship of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the twentieth century. On the one hand, Du Bois demonstrates that a distance from national norms is essential to cosmopolitan thinking, while on the other hand, we

22 For a discussion of how “the idea of a global South” may be problematic, see Ahmad’s article, “‘More than Romance,’” page 792.
can see that local particularities, coming in part from nationalism, are necessary if we are to keep cosmopolitanism from resembling imperialism. Matthew, as an African American, is able to see the wrongs of his country, but his experiences as an American and knowledge of the U.S. constitution enable him to counter the racist claims of the cosmopolitans. Through the relationship of Matthew and Katuliya, he shows how they can each maintain their own national and cultural identities and yet together can provide more support for each other than if they were to turn solely to their own countrymen. Du Bois demonstrates, through their relationship, how our shared vulnerabilities and experiences can unite us across national boundaries.
“They were people who went in for Negroes—Michael and Anne—the Carraways. But not in the social-service, philanthropic sort of way, no. They saw no use in helping a race that was already too charming and naïve and lovely for words. Leave them unspoiled and just enjoy them, Michael and Anne felt”

--Langston Hughes, “Slave on the Block,” The Ways of White Folks, 19

Modernist Primitivism and a Cosmopolitan Indictment of Racism: The Pool Group’s Borderline

By the time Langston Hughes wrote The Ways of White Folks—a clear allusion to Du Bois’ The Souls of Black Folk—in 1934, the figure of the white intellectual who delighted in all things “Negro” was recognizable and, clearly in Hughes’ eyes, laughable. In “Slave on the Block” he tells the story of the Carraways, an artistic couple who welcome an African American young man, Michael, into their house because he looks like “the jungle.” They delight in his blackness. They love to hear him sing Negro spirituals, and Anne pays him to pose shirtless for a painting about a slave being sold at auction. Hughes’ comment that they “saw no use in helping a race that was already too charming and naïve” indicates that they treat him more as a piece of nostalgia and an object to be admired rather than a human being. They prefer to think of Michael as a naïve boy rather than a complex young man with opinions. In another story, “Rejuvenation through Joy,” Hughes again lampoons white people’s fascination with primitiveness when he has a white character suggest that “Negroes [are] the happiest people on earth” and that the way to find joy in life is to listen to “the music that the primitive Negroes brought with their drums from Africa to America…” (70). This comment again indicates a lack of understanding about the contemporary difficulties that African Americans face, seeking instead to rejoice in their art rather than take a social approach. On the one hand, this tendency of some white Americans to champion African American art shows that Du Bois’ goal of demonstrating how African peoples had contributed through their arts to history has been successful—Hughes even mentions that the Carraways “had met Dr Du Bois” (19). On the other hand, it is clear that they have not paid attention to Du Bois’ reports about the deplorable social and economic conditions that African Americans contend with in the South. In these two stories, Hughes identifies the qualities of modernist primitivism which have led critics today to describe it as a more covert form of racism.

One might wonder, then, why I would include in a study of cosmopolitanism a discussion of modernist primitivism. We should study modernist primitivism because an important aspect of
primitivist discourse—the idea that an understanding of other cultures can help us to reflect critically on our own—is also a component of cosmopolitanism. Nussbaum claims that an argument for cosmopolitanism is that “[o]ne of the greatest barriers to rational deliberation in politics is the unexamined feeling that one’s own preferences and ways are neutral and natural” (11). Encountering the ways of other peoples and cultures can encourage critical reflection, allowing us to see that our social mores are not natural at all.

In *Primitivist Modernism*, Sieglende Lemke defines a characteristic of primitivist discourse, “the performative effect of cross-cultural projections,” in a way that sounds a lot like Nussbaum’s argument for cosmopolitanism. Lemke explains, “This variant of primitivist discourse intends to transform one’s own culture” (138). Frequently, “what seem to be merely descriptions of exotic social practices are actually challenges to the reader to establish something similar in his culture….Here, statements about the other…are projections through which European and American cultures try to invigorate themselves” (139). Though the example from Hughes “Rejuvenation from Joy” clearly shows ignorance of the oppression that Africans and African Americans have faced, the suggestion that white Americans should turn to African and African American art to find joy indicates that white Americans are turning to this art as an antidote to the conditions of modernity with which they are dissatisfied, such as industrialization.

In *The Dialect of Modernism*, Michael North makes the case for how the modern attraction to the primitive was not only “a return to nature” and “a recoil from modernity” but also a way of critiquing language conventions and the foundations of racial identity (1). Many modernist artists used “racial ventriloquism” in their work because “the black voice” had “technical distinction” and represented “insurrectionary opposition to the known and familiar in language” (1). When writers such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein used (often stereotyped) African American patterns of speech in their work, it became a method of “white rebellion and escape by means of racial cross-identification” (9). Speaking of white actors who wore blackface, North states: “On one hand, the black persona carries all the connotations of natural, unspoiled authenticity that Europe has attached to other cultures at least since Montesquieu….On the other hand, blackface declares itself openly as a mask, unfixes identity, and frees the actor in a world of self-creation” (7). The wearing of blackface allowed the actor to play with racial identity, showing that it is based on social conventions rather than essential being. While Lemke’s and North’s analyses make clear that the representations of blackness by
white modernists are frequently stereotypical and that the unfixing of identity works largely in
the favor of the white modernist, they also demonstrate the importance of “racial cross-
identification” to modernism’s critique of cultural norms.

In this chapter I will turn to a film, *Borderline* (1930), which uses primitivist discourse
for the purpose of critiquing Western civilization not only for the sake of white people but also
for black people in that they identify racism as one of the problems of modernity. Unlike the
characters of Hughes’ short stories, the white modernists behind *Borderline* demonstrate a social
understanding of the barriers that race presents to contemporary black people. Created by the
Pool film group—comprised of H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Kenneth Macpherson, and Bryher
(Winifred Ellerman)—in collaboration with the Robesons, the film centers on an interracial
affair and the eruption of racism in a small European town. My analysis will be akin to that of
the critics who have noted the film’s exposure of the mechanisms of racism23, but will depart
from them in that I will examine how the film’s examination of racism on a psychological,
social, and international level allow us to see racism as a social crisis that affects us on multiple
levels. Rather than simply use the black characters’ naturalness as an antidote to the chaos of
modernity (for example, industrialization), the filmmakers also show that the white character’s
struggles are caused by their racism. H.D’s reference to “the cosmic racial borderline”24 echoes
Du Bois statement that “the problem of the twentieth century is the color-line” (*Souls* 10).
Through *Borderline*, we see how racism is implicated in and affects life on many different levels.
On a psychological level, the film depicts how the racism of one white character (Astrid) causes
her visible agitation. Socially, we see how ideas about race are related to other socially-
constructed forms of identity like gender and nationality. Finally, we see how racism is a global
phenomenon in that the indeterminacy of the film’s setting and the multiple historical references
allow us to see the part that we all have in racism, including all Western nations and even the
white filmmakers themselves.

I am reading *Borderline* and the intention of its filmmakers much in the way that Nancy
Cunard’s work has been viewed in recent years. As a white woman born to the English upper-
class, Cunard’s essays contain a “privileged gaze” and primitivism; however, these aspects of her

---

23 Annette Debo claims in “Interracial Modernism in Avant-Garde Film” that “*Borderline* uses modernist techniques
not to address the general fragmentation of culture popular in modernism, but to address the machinery of white
racism as well the mentality responsible for lynching…” (372).
24 See H.D.’s pamphlet “*Borderline: A Pool Film with Paul Robeson,*” 221.
work are in tension with her genuine interest in helping oppressed African peoples. As Maureen Moynagh states, “A collector of African art like so many European modernist with a voguish fascination for things primitive, Cunard also devoted much of her considerable energy to the cause of racial justice” (9). Similarly, the white modernists of the Pool group had a “fascination for things primitive” yet also intended to counter the racist stereotypes of Hollywood movies with their avant-garde films. Also like Cunard, there is evidence that the Pool group was aware of the need for social action in addition to appreciating African art. Lemke reads Nancy Cunard’s anthology *Negro* as a departure from previous forms of primitivism and yet still participating in it. Contrasting Cunard’s work with Alain Locke’s *The New Negro*, Lemke explains that though both participate in a primitivist discourse, Cunard’s work is different in that it “launches an attack on Main Street America” and because she is concerned with the working class African American as opposed to just the Black intellectual and artist (132). Likewise, *Borderline* differs from the type of primitivism that simply champions black art in that it uncovers how racist fantasies are essential to upholding Western privilege and social mores such as sexual taboos and gender roles. At one point in the film, the filmmakers show that an appreciation of black art or people is not enough to create social change. I will demonstrate that *Borderline* may even go beyond Cunard’s “attack on Main Street America” in that it attacks the main streets of other Western nations as well.

### Borderline’s Primitivist Discourse

*Borderline* is about the interactions and conflicts between a white couple, Thorne and Astrid, and a presumably African American couple, Pete and Adah, the latter of whom H.D. describes in her pamphlet as biracial. The film opens with a fight between Adah and Thorne which ends their relationship. Unbeknownst to Adah, her lover Pete has arrived in town after having been informed by Astrid of the affair. After ending her relationship with Thorne, Adah is able to reconcile with Pete. The film’s reliance on primitivist discourse becomes apparent when we see Pete and Adah happy together against a natural landscape. Their joy in the countryside, which aligns them with the natural, is clearly meant to be juxtaposed with the white couple’s angst.

The affair between Astrid and Thorne becomes public when Astrid calls Thorne a “nigger lover” in the town bar. Though the androgynous bar manager, the flirtatious barmaid, and the
male piano player (who has a picture of Robeson on his piano) seem empathic toward the black couple, there are rumblings of racism from the bar patrons. The most vocal of these patrons is an old woman in Victorian clothing who comes to represent racism in the film. The tension within the town comes to its height after Astrid is killed. When she attacks Thorne with a knife, he turns it on her and kills her. Rather than blame Thorne, who is acquitted on self-defense, the townspeople direct their anger toward Adah and Pete, the racial outsiders in the town. Adah leaves town and Pete is driven out by the townspeople.

Several critics have commented on the film’s reliance on modernist primitivism and portrayal of Pete as both a deity and a sexual object. Hazel Carby, for example, points out that “the director made an almost obsessive use of close-up” which focuses on Pete’s head and body, relying on “taut skin and flickering muscle…to evoke mood and meaning” (67). In her analysis of the symbolism of hands in the film, Brown seconds Carby’s interpretation when she notes that the focus on Pete’s hands make them seem “beseeching, masculine, and powerfully determined in their close-up framing” (698). Though the eroticism of Robeson’s body seems to at least be a positive portrayal, Carby claims that the gaze of the camera is not all that different from the searing eyes of the lynch mob: “The brutal public torture and dismemberment of blacks by white men, women, and children, … must be recognized as the ever-present underside of artistic or philosophical imaginings of black masculinity as tropes of utopian possibility” (47). Carby’s analysis reminds us that a philanthropic attempt to view black people as models for society may be akin to enacting physical harm on their bodies.

The apparent eroticism of Robeson’s body in Borderline is further complicated by the fact that many of the white filmmakers were known to fetishize blackness as part of the primitivism trend. Susan Stanford Friedman notes that “…Macpherson and Herring were part of the white crowd for whom ‘the Negro was in vogue’” (98). Macpherson, in fact, is known to have had affairs with black men after 1928, and it is possible that H.D., who was involved in a ménage a trios with Bryher and Macpherson at the time, was jealous of Macpherson’s attraction to black men. There is evidence that H.D. was attracted to Paul Robeson herself in her short story “Two Americans” and her poem “Red Roses for Bronze” (101). What is less often quoted from Friedman is her mention that Bryher actually “hated the Harlem parties,” suggesting that not everyone in the Pool film group immersed themselves in the Harlem fad. Friedman’s argument should also remind us that while their personal relationships with African Americans were
certainly complicated, these personal encounters may have inspired their anti-racist work. Friedman argues that H.D.’s encounter with Robeson and work on the film helped her to articulate her own “‘borderline’ existence” as a woman: “This identification comes without obscuring the real difference between whites and blacks, but rather through her attempt as a white woman to imaginatively put herself in the place of the Other” (107). As Friedman notes, H.D. believed that Macpherson’s use of montage and other filmic techniques would give the audience a glimpse of the “‘nightmare’” of racism (108).

Another way in which primitivism is expressed in the film is through the filmmaker’s use of psychoanalytic theory to shape the film. H.D. and Bryher both underwent psychoanalysis, and the Pool group’s journal about film, *Close Up*, included several articles on the relationship of psychoanalytic theory to film.25 Jean Walton, in “‘Nightmare of the Uncoordinated White-Folk’: Race, Psychoanalysis, and H.D.’s *Borderline,*” argues that “The film accentuates Freud’s ideas with a racialized white/black binary that places the black subject beyond the ‘civilized’” (400). Walton explains that just as Freud made a distinction “between ‘natural’ and ‘civilized’ sexual morality,” so do the filmmakers of *Borderline*:

H.D. and the POOL group frequently and unthinkingly reproduce this distinction between the ‘natural’ and ‘civilized,’ with its apparently explanatory account of cultural attainment and neurosis, as a white/black binary: The film’s black character’s connote a ‘natural’ sexual morality that largely evades the repressive influence of ‘civilized’ (read ‘white’) moral codes. (401)

In reproducing this binary, Walton argues, the filmmakers fail to give the black characters the same psychological complexity as the white characters. The result is that the film falls into the trap of limited universalism for though “…Macpherson posited a universal ‘human mind’ whose essential labyrinthine nature is shared by male and female, black and white,” the film fails to explore the “interiority” of the black characters to the extent that it does the white characters (Walton 400). Walton also explains that the film’s use of this binary is also a result of its efforts “to counter the blatantly racist productions of the American film industry” (399). In trying to combat negative images of black people, the filmmakers seem to go too far in representing Pete as akin with nature and god-like, what Walton calls “prehuman,” which denies him (and Adah).

---

25 Laura Marcus explains that *Close Up* “was substantially informed by psychoanalytic thought and theory” (Marcus 240).
the complex psychological make-up of the white characters (400). While I will add that Pete’s outburst of violence toward a white man in the bar does show him to be human and imperfect, this example of conflict is brief in comparison to the portrayal of Astrid’s and Thorne’s interior struggles. It seems that the film falls into the trap of other primitivist works which use “overly celebratory assertions on the nature of black people” and misses the fact that there is “condescension underlying much of primitivist-romanticist veneration” (Lemke 134).

*Psychoanalysis and Anti-Racism*

Though Walton does mention that the filmmakers’ lapses in complicating the black characters is related to their anti-racist politics, Walton does not fully examine how, for the Pool group, the use of psychoanalytic techniques in film was meant to reveal societal problems. Laura Marcus explains that for H.D., “psychoanalysis is presented as a way of freeing individuals and cultures from their stultifying histories and readying them for modernity” (240). Friedman makes a similar claim about H.D.’s understanding of psychology when she says, “H.D. believed that lasting change begins with the individual psyche…” (93). We see this same idea of how psychoanalysis can be used to cure societal ills in C.J. Pennethorne Hughes’ article “Dreams and Films” from *Close Up*. He claims, “The film is the dream of the post-war world” and that it “expresses many of the sub- or barely conscious aspirations of the generation” (260). He also states that “by adopting and exploiting the mechanism of the dream” that they “might come to “fuller realisation” (262). When Hughes says that the audience “might come to a fuller realisation” he means that the film should work as the psychoanalyst does to illuminate the meaning of the suppressed desires. For the Pool group, psychology worked on a cultural as well as personal level, and film was a way to expose and perhaps cure cultural neuroses.

In *Borderline*, the subconscious cultural fantasy which is revealed is race hatred. Macpherson describes the film as such when he states, “*Borderline*’s suggestion was of conflict, of mental wars, of hate and enmity” (237). McCabe argues that the cultural fantasies about race are refuted in that the film’s “avant-garde montage deftly portrays the way sexual and racial fantasies are inscribed upon the body. In its seventy-five minute length, it exposes the projection and displacement of white desires upon the black body, disrupting the myths formulated by D.W.

---

26 Hans Sachs makes a similar claim in his article “Film Psychology” for *Close Up*: “The film can be effective only in so far as it is able to make these psychological coherencies visible; in so far as it can externalize and make perceptible—if possible in movement—invisible inward events” (250).
Griffith’s 1915 *Birth of a Nation*…” (1). Much as I have argued that DuBois’ *Dark Princess* undermines the racist myth of black men raping white women which *Birth of a Nation* (1915) propagandizes, McCabe argues that *Borderline* “inverts this mythology” by showing “the white desire for the black body” rather than “showing the black male as succumbing to uncontrollable impulses of sexual desire and violence” (645). Rather, Thorne is the one who first lusts after Adah and then becomes violent when he kills Astrid. In contrast, Pete is the only character who has no responsibility in the affair and is an entirely innocent victim. McCabe adds that when Pete does act in a violent way, at one point punching a white man in the bar for evidently making fun of Adah for her affair with Thorne, Pete fights “not to protect the ideal ‘purity’ of womanhood like the white protagonists in *Birth of a Nation*, but to protect Adah’s dignity and his own” (646).

In addition to refuting racist fantasies through this reversal, the film also shows how Astrid’s angst and burst of violence are connected to her racism. In Walton’s article, she argues that Pete’s “‘natural’ eroticism conveyed by his joyful merging with the elements” is contrasted with Astrid’s “‘repressed’ eroticism that results in the frenzied, neurotic manipulation of the knife leading to her death scene” (404). Though Walton makes a strong case for how Astrid’s brandishing of the knife is a sign of her sexual repression, consideration of how the filmmakers intended to use film to uncover cultural fantasies and a close look at the events leading up to this scene suggests that Astrid’s outburst is not only a result of her sexual repression but also of her racism. The film suggests that the same societal forces which are responsible for Astrid’s sexual repression are also responsible for her racism.

Through symbolism and the trope of miscegenation, *Borderline* demonstrates how sexuality and race are interrelated. The talk in the town is caused not by the affair but by its interracial nature. Similarly, Astrid’s anger is caused not only by her lover’s betrayal but also because, as her statement that Thorne is a “nigger lover” indicates, he has chosen a black woman over her. Astrid’s racism aligns her with an elderly woman wearing Victorian-era clothing who also voices racist sentiment. After word about Thorne’s and Adah’s affair has circulated through the town, the old woman is shown talking with other townspeople in the bar. The title card says, “If I had my way, not one negro would be allowed in the country!” The fact that she and Astrid are the only two characters to have spoken words (on title cards) with racist statements is particularly note-worthy in a silent film. The old woman is shown to be symbolic of racism when her figure is juxtaposed with flames and a poster of a black man in a montage series just before
Pete is thrown out of town. The Victorian era which she represents was a period during which scientific racism was frequently used as a justification for expansion of the British Empire. Considering this fact, her statement that black people should not be allowed in the country takes on a certain irony since it was imperialism which brought black people to Europe in the first place. It is also possible that the old woman symbolizes Victorian-era gender norms. The combination of the two women represents the various mechanisms of racism. The old woman’s racist remarks demonstrate how race is frequently used as a determinant for citizenship, and the ways in which nationalist sentiment can perpetuate racism. Astrid’s comments show how racism is related to fears about miscegenation and propagation of the race. It seems that this young, worldly woman has a good deal in common with the Victorian woman—Astrid retains the old woman’s traditional ideas about gender and race.

The fact that these two women are aligned in the scene leading up to Astrid’s attack on Thorne suggests that Astrid’s agitation is motivated, at least in part, by her racism. Late in the film, Astrid is shown playing cards while a stuffed seagull (which H.D. calls a Victorian symbol) rests on the table. Astrid then has a scuffle with Thorne, during which an ace of spades falls to the floor. During this time, the phrase “black as the ace of spades” was commonly used, and, in fact, was used to describe Paul Robeson at one point. The repeated focus on the black ace of spades during this sequence suggests that Astrid cannot erase Thorne’s interracial affair from her mind. After Astrid wakes up from having passed out, she looks out the window and sees the old woman walk by on the street. They look at one another for a prolonged period as Astrid clings to her Victorian shawl. When Thorne enters with a suitcase, Astrid sees Adah’s face superimposed upon it. It seems that Thorne’s desire for Adah, a black woman, is an insult and danger to her white womanhood. Shortly afterward, Astrid slashes at Thorne with a knife and he turns the knife on her. Her hatred is turned back upon herself, resulting in her death.

In contrast, the more modern figures of the bar manager, the piano player, and the bar maid, bend gender norms and seem more empathetic toward the black characters. Through montage, the scene where Astrid attacks Thorne is inter-spliced with a scene in the bar where

---

27 See Debo’s description of this montage sequence in “Interracial Modernism in Avant-Garde Film,” 374.
28 In Race Men, Hazel Carby quotes a 1926 issue of the New Republic in which Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant describes Robeson as “‘Six feet two and one-half inches tall, twenty-seven years old, black as the Ace of Spades, he is a man of outstanding gifts and of noble physical strength and beauty’” (48).
29 Jean Walton explains that this shawl is Victorian in “‘Nightmare of the Uncoordinated White Folk.’” See page 404.
Pete and the bar maid are flirting. Pete is shown playing with gender roles as he places a rose behind his ear. The relation of the two scenes foreshadows how Astrid’s death will have an affect upon Pete. The montage allows us to see how the two parallel narratives are related to one another. Also, though, the scene between Pete and the barmaid acts as a foil to Astrid and Thorne’s anger. Accepting that identity, whether it be gender or race, is non-essential role-playing allows Pete and the barmaid to interact without conflict. In another scene, the bar manager—who is androgynous-looking and appears to be the barmaid’s lover—and the piano player remove Thorne from Pete and Adah’s room at the back of the bar. Though it may be that the bar manager simply does not want any trouble in her bar, it may also be that she, as someone who is borderline herself in terms of her gender, is more empathetic toward Pete and Adah than the others. The fact that the gender-bending characters are the least racist of the characters suggests that the filmmakers see the social pressures which generate gender norms as also contributing to racism.

The “We” of Racism

Interestingly, *Borderline* demonstrates that the societal problem of racism can be used to create unity once it is recognized that we all take part in it. After the bar manager receives a note stating that Pete must leave town, Pete looks at the bar manager and a title card reads, “What do you think?” The bar manager then replies, trying to explain the townspeople’s behavior, “We are like that.” The “we” hear seems to signify those within the town or perhaps white people, since it is both the townspeople and Astrid, who is not a native of the area, are racist. It is interesting that the bar manager includes herself within this group since it is she who helps to throw out Thorne when he confronts Pete and Adah in their room. The fact that she includes herself within the “we,” though, suggests that she acknowledges the history of racism with the town and within white society. The “we” is then extended even further when Pete replies, on a title card, “Yes, we are like that.” As Judith Brown explains it, the “we…now becomes more expansive and inclusive” (702). The “we” now seems to stand for people black and white since it includes Pete. He seems to acknowledge, perhaps because of his own outburst of violence, that humans are vulnerable to feelings of hatred. This understanding of racism reflects the kind of cosmopolitanism that Gilroy urges when he suggests that “multicultural ethics and politics could
be premised upon an agonistic, planetary humanism capable of comprehending the universality of our elemental vulnerability to the wrongs we visit upon each other” (4).

*Borderline* emphasizes the “universality” of this “vulnerability” in that the white filmmakers hint at their own part in racism. Friedman makes the observation that H.D.’s role as the racist Astrid may well have been a way for H.D. to face her own racism: “It is certainly possible that H.D. projected into this character [Astrid] her own rage and jealousy at the black lovers for whom Macpherson had left her. If so, it is all the more startling that she could confront and condemn the racist form a betrayed white woman’s anger could take” (109). In addition to H.D., Macpherson also places himself in the position of a racist white male who is the one punched by Pete in the bar. Additionally, the filmmakers suggest that white modernists’ fascination with “all things Negro” may not be enough to make political change. The piano player, played by Herring, has a picture of Pete/Robeson on his piano which he takes down after Pete is forced to leave town. His admiration for Pete may cause him to feel empathy for him, but it does not keep Pete from being exiled. Rather, it seems that more overt counters to racism, such as this film, are needed to make real political change.

The “we” of racism is further accentuated in the film by the fact that racism is shown to cross national boundaries. The film was, importantly, an interracial collaboration between the POOL film group and the Robesons, and also a collaboration of people of different nationalities. H.D. notes in her pamphlet, which describes the plot and process of creating *Borderline*, that Macpherson, who was Scottish, crosses borderlines in terms of his national background: “Mr. Macpherson is Nordic, is English in general European terminology, though obviously his intense specialized inspiration is that of the northern Celt” (223). Also, both H.D. and Paul Robeson, along with his wife Eslanda Robeson, were American expatriates at this time. (H.D. wrote about their shared status as American expatriates in her short story “Two Americans”)31. H.D.’s work was also transatlantic in that H.D. was known, at least among

---

31 Susan Stanford Friedman summarizes this privately published story in a footnote in *Analyzing Freud*: “In the Nietzschean geography of the story, Daniel (the Macpherson figure) represents the Apollonian and European while Saul (the Robeson figure) embodies the Dionysian and American. Raymode (the H.D. figure) is caught between the two and in the end finds herself empowered and restored to her American roots by identifying with Saul’s powerful black presence on stage as he challenges the white men” (471n). Debo also comments on this story when she states, “…‘Two Americans’…makes clear the respect she [H.D.] developed for Robeson and how she saw himself connect with him on the basis of American nationality in Europe where their connection as Americans overcame the racial divide” (381).
intellectual circles, as an “innovative poet in both the U.S. and Europe” (Debo 373). Bryher and Herring were British.

Also, the film was intended for an international audience. Judith Brown explains in “Borderline, Sensation, and the Machinery of Expression,” that while they had the ability to include verbal sound in the film, the Pool group was “interested in saving the ‘universal’ language of silent film from the new threat of the talking pictures” (689). In an article for Close Up, Hans Sachs explains that “the complete arrival of the talkie has made the geographical distribution of films…a necessarily national affair” (262). The Pool group’s purposeful creation of a silent film, then, can be seen as an effort to transcend national differences. Though, from our current critical position, we might argue that there would still be cultural barriers in a silent film which would not make it wholly “universal,” we can still understand that a silent film paired with music would be much more easily comprehended by people of different cultures and languages than a talking picture. In fact, it seems that the film was viewed in several different countries. As reported by Debo, “Borderline was shown in art houses in England (in at least two cinemas), in France by “Studio Cineas,” in Germany, Edinburgh, and Belgium at the yearly international independent film festival, as well as in Glasgow, Spain, Holland, and Denmark” (380). The filmmakers intended to show Borderline in America but the film was “[s]topped at U.S. customs because of its frank treatment of racial discrimination and interracial sex” and was not shown in the United States until 1978 (Friedman 131n). As Annette Debo explains, “The Hays Code, which purported to prevent ‘indecent’ material in films, forbid the representation of miscegenation in films, and in order to be distributed in the U.S., all films had to receive a Production Code Seal, which would not have been granted to Borderline,” even though the film makers did attempt to have it approved for screening in the U.S. (380).  

Though the setting of the film is clearly an older European village, the name of the town and country is never revealed. The only distinguishing feature is that of the Swiss mountains and landscape which act as a backdrop to Pete’s and Adah’s reconciliation. Even so, the setting remains a general European town. As H.D. states in the pamphlet, “There are in Europe, many just such little towns as this particular borderline town of some indefinite mid-European

---

32 Debo explains how the correspondence between the Pool filmmakers demonstrates their attempt to have the film shown in the U.S.: “Bryher corresponded with Herman G. Weinberg who ran an art theater in Baltimore, MD about his company distributing the film in the U.S. He hoped to have it shown in avant-garde film theaters in Boston, Hollywood, Chicago, Newark, Philadelphia, and New York, as well as Baltimore…” (380).
mountain district” (221). The fact that the town is a “borderline town” is important because it creates the opportunity for conflict between the natives and travelers such as “the half-world mundane Astrid” and her lover Thorne who have come to the area for relaxation. Robeson’s character, Pete, is also described as a traveler and is shown arriving on a train in the first scene. Of course, Pete’s and Adah’s black skin also mark them as non-natives in this town of white people. H.D. emphasizes that this place is one where people go to escape the rest of the world and compares it to other small towns around in Europe and the United States: “They live as such people do the world over, in just such little social borderline rooms as just such couples seek in Devonshire, in Cornwall, in the South of France, in Provincetown, United States” (221). H.D.’s statement here reflects what Marcus describes as a distinguishing feature of H.D.’s prose writing in that she frequently used “palimpsestic ‘superimpositions’ of different times and spaces” (240). Marcus also explains that H.D.’s prose writing had a strong influence over the filmic techniques of the Pool group. This feature of H.D.’s writing seems to have had an impact on the setting of Borderline in that it functions as a palimpsest of various spaces.

The “palimpsestic” setting allows for multiple historical references to racism, including the United States’ history of racial oppression and lynching—as H.D. says, this could be a town in the U.S. Annette Debo, in “Interracial Modernism in Avant-Garde Film: Paul Robeson and H.D. in the 1930 Borderline,” argues that the film makes overt references to American racism. She reads the ending, when Pete is expelled from the town, as a figurative lynching: “…a montage sequence intercuts flames, the poster of a black body, white fists, and an increasingly angry white mob, which coupled with the town’s physical expulsion of Pete leads me to argue that Borderline also speaks against lynching” (374). Debo adds that recent reports about the number of lynchings in the U.S. and H.D.’s association with Nancy Cunard, who wrote about the Scottsboro case, means that the POOL group would have been very much aware of the historical and social significance of the symbols that they employ in the film. Ultimately, the film “deconstructs the popular post-slavery myth of lynching as apt punishment for black men who rape white women, which ignore the reality of how lynching was used to reinforce white control” (375). The logic of this myth is shown to be false in that, Debo argues, it is the white woman, Astrid, who pulls a black man into her relationship problems. Like McCabe, Debo points out that it is the white man who is shown to be truly to blame for having an affair with a black woman and then killing a white woman.
Reading the film as making a commentary on American racism is supported by H.D.’s remarks about lynching in her pamphlet. H.D. describes the scene in which Thorne and Pete confront one another. She claims that as Thorne stands in the doorway staring at Pete that Thorne “is seen posed as if a noose were dangling him from a floor, which we feel reel beneath his feet by his parallel of contraries. A small touch perhaps, to be noticed by a few only, but bound to have subconscious significance…If a black man is hanged for loving a white woman, why should not a white man be likewise lynched for loving a black one?” (234). Though I must admit that I was not among the few who noticed that Thorne’s body language suggested a lynching, H.D.’s interpretation certainly rings true with the more overt references to racism, and American racism in particular, in the film. At another point in the pamphlet, H.D. denies that the director is trying to make a direct political comment on racism, but Debo’s research on Macpherson’s creation of the film suggests otherwise. Debo states, “He wished to make a film that would accurately portray the position of African-Americans in the south under Jim Crow segregation and white oppression…” (379). Apparently, Macpherson changed his original plan when Paul Robeson objected to playing yet another stereotypical role for black actors, so instead, Macpherson “settled for addressing similar themes of racism in a less stereotypical setting” (379).

It is this “less stereotypical setting” that allows the film to make a more international indictment of racism in that it takes it out of a purely American context. Though the film clearly alludes to American racism, it is significant to the film that it is not actually set in America because it allows the audience to see how, though perhaps in a more subtle way, racism exists in Europe as well as in the United States. While there is a clear difference between a figurative lynching of Pete who is thrown out of town and a real lynching which might happen in the American South, the audience can still see that in Europe racism takes on the more subtle forms of taboo and social ostracism. In fact, the audience might have seen a similarity between the “legal lynching” of the Scottsboro boys and Pete’s official exile from the town in that racism is more obviously becoming a government-sanctioned practice. The European setting might make us believe, at first, that this town is void of racism. After all, many African Americans moved to Europe following WWI and became expatriates (including Paul Robeson) in order to escape America’s oppressive racism. The fact that Pete enters and then leaves on a train and is described as a “half-vagabond,” though, suggests that he must remain mobile because racism will always
rear its ugly head no matter where he goes. While the town bar, where most of the action in the film takes place, seems to have the potential to be anti-racist, the town’s racism eventually forces the bar manager to evict Pete. Though the piano player admires Pete (he even has a picture of Pete on his piano), and both he and the bar manager help to throw out Thorne when he tries to enter Pete and Adah’s room at the back of the bar, Astrid’s racist and other characters’ racist statements also occur in the bar. Despite a glimmer of equal treatment, the town and the bar are not immune to racism.

Some critics have noted that the film indicts British and European forms of racism in that it alludes to the rising fascism of the day. Speaking of the film’s historical and social context, Judith Brown states, “The village may seem to exist outside of time, its cobblestoned streets and centuries-old buildings a backdrop to life as it has always been, but its resistance to change itself and its hostility to the racial otherness in the figure of Pete place it in historical time and position its townspeople within a larger cultural current of tightening group affiliation” (691). McCabe makes the connection of the film to 1930s world politics even more clear when she states, “By the time of Borderline, the Nazis already had a presence, and this repressive presence haunts the film’s racializing of sexuality” (643). She later adds, “Borderline further reveals how racial hatred directly emerges from the sexual fear of losing racial purity. This fear of ‘impurity’ increases with the rise of fascism and its anti-miscegenation laws to protect the Aryan race” (647). As both Brown’s and McCabe’s statements suggest, by the time of Borderline’s premiere in 1930, hysteria over racial degeneracy was a growing international trend.

In both America and Europe, eugenics policies were becoming increasingly popular and miscegenation was becoming increasingly suspect. Ann Laura Stoler aptly explains in her article “Making Empire Respectable” that the need to protect racial purity was spurned on by fears over the loss of imperial control and over the possible inadequacies of Western civilization. Stoler states that interracial unions fell into greatest disfavor during “interwar years when Western scientific and technological achievements were then in question and native national and labor movements were energetically pressing their demands” (366). In response there developed “a metropolitan bourgeois discourse…intensely concerned with notions of ‘degeneration.’” Middle-class morality, manliness, and motherhood were seen as endangered by the intimately linked fears of ‘degeneration’ and miscegenation in scientifically construed racist beliefs” (355). This discourse resulted in increased, as McCabe mentions, anti-miscegenation laws and a push for
positive eugenics which encouraged white, middle-class women to reproduce for the sake of the white race. Stoler extrapolates, “In France, England, Germany, and the United States, positive eugenics placed European women of ‘good stock’ as the ‘fountainhead of racial strength,’ exalting the cult of motherhood while subjecting it to more thorough scientific scrutiny” (306). Through its non-specific setting, the film demonstrates that the taboo of miscegenation is an international phenomenon in that its source is the hypocritical fear of racial mixing within the white race.

A Comparison to Cunard’s “Black Man and White Ladyship”

The significance of the film’s transnational examination of racism becomes even more apparent when it is compared with Nancy Cunard’s essay “Black Man and White Ladyship” (1931). Cunard’s work and life was intertwined with that of the Pool film group. Especially for H.D., who did not visit America between 1921 and 1936, figures like Cunard were important to her understanding of race relations in the U.S. As Friedman explains, Cunard was a “key bridge figure between the black and white avant-garde of the twenties and thirties” (96). Bryher and Cunard were also connected in that they were the daughters of “England’s two most powerful shipping magnates” and “both rebelled…and used what money they controlled to sponsor the arts and promote progressive political causes” (97). Though Bryher and Cunard often disagreed on their methods, they remained associates for many years and Bryher even helped to support Cunard’s Scottsboro defense organization (98).

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the Pool film group is also similar to Cunard in that she too has been accused of fetishizing race and using primitivist discourse. Lemke explains that despite Cunard’s clear anti-racist intentions and efforts to counter primitivism, her anthology “Negro…never manages to escape the primitivism it sought to critique” (133). Jane Marcus, in Hearts of Darkness, also mentions that the Negro anthology participated in primitivism: “Their enthusiasm for the Other and the Other’s arts and culture, for his body—and I say his advisedly—is indeed marked by a primitivist curiosity that was often erotic and sometimes exploitive” (3). Marcus adds, though, that “the Negro anthology marks the moment when certain white Western intellectuals met African intellectuals and artists on their own terms, with respect and admiration” (3). A similar argument could be made for Borderline in that the Pool group was willing to make compromises with the Robesons on the subject matter.
of the film. Both Marcus and Moynagh remark that Cunard’s connection of her own struggles as a woman (though she was resistant to feminism throughout her life) with racism and colonialism makes her truly remarkable in comparison to many of her contemporaries. I have argued that Borderline’s creators were able to make this same connection.

“Black Man and White Ladyship” was published around the same time of Borderline’s debut and has several similarities to the film. Cunard examines the taboo of miscegenation and how racism relates to assumptions about gender, class, and national identity. In “Black Man White Ladyship,” Cunard discusses her mother’s reaction to the news that her daughter has a black lover and explains how her mother’s racism stems from her understanding of class and what constitutes womanhood. Like Borderline, Cunard’s essay examines how lynching is justified by white American’s hypocritical fear of racial mixing: “The authorities take part in, often encourage the lynching. In the name of white American womanhood! Yet the father and mothers and ancestors of this superlative womanhood…were in a very great number of cases suckled at the black breast” (190). Cunard also points out, just as Borderline does, how sexual others are often grouped with racial others. Cunard’s mother defines her white womanhood against homosexuality, considering it to be an unsafe topic and saying “Wilde’s case is really too unpleasant to be discussed” (187).

Cunard also explains that her mother’s racism is related to the fact that her mother is an American (though she did live in England most of her life). She states,

But you Ladyship, you cannot kill or deport a person from England for being a Negro and mixing with white people. You may take a ticket to the cracker southern states of the U.S.A. and assist at some of the choicer lynchings which are often announced in advance. You may add your purified-of-that-horrible-American-twang voice to the Yankee outbursts: America for white folks…. (182-83)

Though Cunard mentions at another point in the essay that her association with a black man caused quite a scandal in England as well, her focus remains on the explicit racism of the United States. Cunard is justifiably angry about the frequency of lynchings in the United States, which she wrote about extensively, but she seems to have a blind spot when it comes to European forms of racism.

---

33 See Moynagh’s introduction to Essays on Race and Empire, 23-25. In Marcus’ Hearts of Darkness, see page 5.
In regards to France, Cunard states, “Many people of different classes have no race or colour prejudice whatsoever. In France it is non-existent. It is not a problem but a glory to have so many black subjects” (192). It is true that France demonstrated less prejudice than many other Western countries, as evidenced by the fact that many African American expatriates resided in Paris in the mid-twentieth century, but it is curious that Cunard, who writes a good deal about the detrimental affects of European empire, seems to ignore the racism involved in French imperialism. To the contrary, Cunard mentions, “When in Montmarte some Negroes shot in self-defense a bunch of drunken Yankee sailors who had attacked them the French took the Negroes’ side” (192). While the French are surely to be applauded in this case, this one example overshadows the ill treatment that African peoples received in French colonies and the racism that resulted from France’s need to hold the empire together. Along with other imperialist European nations who saw their control over their empires slipping during the early twentieth century, France joined in the hysteria over the possibility of racial degeneracy as a result of mixing with “natives” in the colonies. For example, French men who had interracial relationships in Indochina were looked down upon because “[m]etissage (interracial relationships)…represented the paramount danger to racial purity and cultural identity in all its forms” (Stoler 360). Ann Stoler also explains that this fear over the decline of the race expressed itself in the form of positive eugenics at home: “In France, where declining birthrates were of grave concern, popular colonial authors such as Pierre Mille pushed mothering as women’s ‘essential contribution to the imperial mission of France’” (363).

The fact that Cunard overlooks France’s imperial racism is surprising considering her extensive work on the history of and continuation of colonialism. In her anthology Negro, for instance, Cunard includes an essay on the history of Jamaica which examines the racial and economical dimensions of British colonialism on the island. While this work certainly demonstrates that racism crosses national boundaries, my examination of “Black Man and White Ladyship” points out how easily we can overlook subtler forms of racism in comparison to the more overt forms. Cunard was very critical of America and of her birthplace, England, but does not apply this same critical eye to her chosen country of residence. My comparison of this essay and the film is also important in that it points out the differences between two modernist primitivist works. We should not assume that just because two works use a primitivist discourse

---

34 See Cunard’s “Jamaica—The Negro Island” in Essays on Race and Empire.
that they are using it in the same way or with the same result. Also, not all indictments of racism are the same. By comparing Cunard’s essay with *Borderline*, we can see how the film’s general European setting and exploration of the motivations behind racism enables the filmmakers to indict racism in all its forms across Western Civilization. The film would have enabled its white and likely liberal audience to see that even they contribute to racism.

Tania Friedel explains that the relation of cosmopolitanism and progressive racial discourse “names the central paradox with which one must necessarily struggle when considering the historical and socio-political realities of racial particulars while at the same time acknowledging the equally important possibility of non-essentialized being…” (7). Where *Borderline* seems to fail is that while it considers the common humanity of black and white people, its need to show black people to be better than whites, and therefore different, prevents it from fully exploring the psyches of black people. The film does act, though, as “a mode of critical thinking that is committed to struggling with the paradoxes and contradictions of cultural identity and discourse,” an essential aspect of cosmopolitanism, in that it explores the many ways, including racially and in terms of gender and sexuality, identity is written by social norms. The filmmakers are also clearly cognizant of how racism places black people in a different position of power from whites. Despite the film’s fetishism of the black body, its examination of racism is an important reminder of how we should confront our historical and continuing responsibility in creating racial division. Gilroy argues that we must consider racism’s role in structuring life over the course of history and today, and that in order to do so, we should return to mid-twentieth century discussions of racism: “That return is necessary because consideration of these questions has only a minimal presence in today’s incomplete genealogies of the global movement for human rights, which are inclined to imagine that conflict between ‘race’ and more inclusive models of humanity was concluded long ago” (14).
"Above all, relationships are changing."

--Kwame Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (103)

**The (Im)possibility of Cosmopolitan Romance in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room***

In her recent and compelling article, “Undesirable Desire: Citizenship and Romance in Modern American Fiction,” Carla Kaplan examines how American modernists both thwarted and rearticulated the obsession with romance and with taxonomic categories during the early twentieth century. Kaplan argues that despite modernism’s “anti-romantic cynicism and lack of sentimentality” a major trope of modernism is that of ‘‘undesirable desire’—desire for that which is marked as undesirable, that which ‘ought not to be desired’ or even ‘that may not be desired’” (145). Citing Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt* and Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, among other American modernist texts, as examples, Kaplan explains that “undesirable desire” often takes on the form of desire for those of the same sex or racial others (146), so that

[b]y recuperating romance, telling stories about who was and was not desirable and why, modernists were able to participate in complex on-going cultural debates about citizenship, identity, and race. The trope of undesirable desire provided a covert means of getting in on cultural debates over national belonging, of participating—through the construction of desirable and undesirable love objects—in the national debate over who was and was not a desirable American and why. (147)

Kaplan goes on to argue, however, that while these narratives offered a critique of who was acceptable, they may also reinforce the twentieth-century obsession with racial categorization and have created new “fixed types.” The fact that many of these modernist romances are doomed to failure, may ultimately stabilize the notion of who is acceptable: “This play of attraction and repulsion serves as a paradigm and mirror for a nation unable to come to terms with its own national romances of undesirable desire as well as for a modernist challenge that often, finally, failed to challenge the terms of the debate” (164). In her discussion of Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, for example, Kaplan explains that the fact that Clare, who transgresses multiple boundaries including those of race and sexuality, dies in the end, forecloses the possibility of her being accepted within the nation. Kaplan states, “The modern recuperation of romance…appears to be self-canceling. Not only is there no space for a more complicated national identity—such as Clare’s—but there is no space, finally, for its narrative articulation” (164).
Though Kaplan does not directly use the word cosmopolitanism, her analysis of modernism’s recuperation of romance can be applied to a discussion of cosmopolitanism. These romantic stories of “undesirable desire” demonstrate the possibility or impossibility of creating bonds across boundaries of race, sexuality, and national identity. In describing romance, Kaplan states, “Romance offers an allegory for social relations, an exploration of those forms of intimacy, recognition and reciprocity we long for in the public sphere” (155). The modernist trope of “undesirable desire,” then, “provided modern writers with a way to imagine crossing social lines between so-called desirable and so-called undesirable citizens, with a way to rewrite, within the romance narrative, the nation’s story of citizenship and its politics of recognition” (156). Given this analogy of the romantic plot to social relations, we can then determine that the failure of this romance, as Kaplan explains through her analysis of *Passing*, means that the modernist novel may then demonstrate the impossibility of these kinds of social relations: “The apparent impossibility of [“a mutually beneficial exchange”] is frequently the narrative premise that drives modern fiction. Alienation, fragmentation, atomization, and the isolation endemic to modern social life seem to render recognition impossible. Again and again the story told by the modern novel is one of failed exchange” (154).

This understanding of romance and modernists’ use of it can be applied to cosmopolitanism in that in addition to transgressing the boundaries of race and sexuality, modernist narratives of “undesirable desire” also transgress national and cultural boundaries. In many modernist expatriate novels, the thwarted lovers are not only racial others or of the same sex but also come from different countries. Using Kaplan’s analysis of “undesirable desire” as a spring board, I will ask whether it is possible for a novel that follows this trope of “undesirable desire,” James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*, to end in tragedy and yet still demonstrate the possibility for love and real connections across boundaries of sexuality, race, and nationality. *Giovanni’s Room* follows the trope of “undesirable desire,” as Kaplan outlines it, in that the

35 Kaplan cites Anthony Giddens’ *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love &Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Standford: Stanford UP, 1991) and Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) in her analysis of romance as an “allegory for social relations” (155). Kaplan states: “Romance, as Anthony Giddens has suggested, offers a kind of paradigm for ‘free and equal relations’ in the public sphere (184-85). ‘The possibility of intimacy means the promise of democracy,’ Giddens argues (188). It suggest ‘an ethical framework for a democratic personal order’ by positing the fulfillment of our needs for recognition, foregrounding ‘revelation to the other’ as a ‘binding aspiration of democratically ordered communication’ (188, 190). Romance takes for granted, as Nancy Armstrong has argued, the possibility of a ‘mutually beneficial exchange’” (31).
American expatriate, David, desires an Italian immigrant bartender, Giovanni, and yet feels that he should not desire him according to national narratives of heteronormativity. Though the novel seems to demonstrate the impossibility of this relationship, it does hint that an alternative could have been reached if only the main character could have given up his American values which keep him from accepting himself as human, reinforce ideals of the heterosexual family and reproduction, and make him assert his differences rather than his commonalities with others. *Giovanni’s Room* offers some hope for the possibility of cosmopolitan relations so long as we can deconstruct and re-think our national and personal myths. Baldwin demonstrates this possibility by showing that what keeps David from having a relationship with Giovanni is not their relationship cannot exist in the world but that David clings to his Americanism even when he is abroad. It is their relationship which ultimately makes David realize the mythology on which he has built his own identity and on which his national identity is founded. In doing so, the novel offers a critique of American nationalism much stronger than that of DuBois’ *Dark Princess* in that being American is an obstacle rather than a key to cosmopolitanism.

Though many critics have read *Giovanni’s Room* as an example of Baldwin’s exploration of his own sexuality and expatriate experiences rather than as a social commentary, I think that Baldwin’s explicit connections between David’s notions of national identity, his masculinity and sexuality are an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which Americans’ social mores lead them to view themselves as separate from Europe. At the very beginning of the text, David’s reflection on himself, as he literally stares into the mirror, takes the form of a reflection on his country’s imperial past: “My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past” (221). Robert Tomlinson reads this passage as a sign of David’s blindness: “Europe is to be taken here as the source of a repressive White civilization, although in the person of Giovanni it takes on an opposite symbolic value” (140). I have to disagree with Tomlinson’s claim that David is blaming imperialism on Europe; rather, I think that at this point in the novel, when David has come to accept some responsibility for what he did to Giovanni, that David is

36 Robert Tomlinson, in “‘Payin’ One’s Dues’: Expatriation as Personal Experience and Paradigm in the Works of James Baldwin” (*African American Review* 33.1, 1999), states, “Typically, Giovanni’s Room is seen as an intensely personal harrowing of the author’s demons while the confrontations of Another Country are perceived as taking place in a more public and political arena (cf. Gibson 317)” (135).
explaining that America was an imperial project from the start and has become the inheritors of Europe’s drive for empire-building. David’s statement that his ancestors “faced away from Europe into a darker past” suggests that though they think of themselves as different from Europe, they have actually carried on with their own “death-laden” path. As he stares at his own reflection, he acknowledges his own “dark past” and that of his native country. In Mae G. Henderson’s reading of this passage, she usefully notes that David’s guilt over his responsibility (if indirect) in Giovanni’s death is related to his ancestral guilt: “The evocation of his ancestors identifies David’s loss of innocence with America’s, even at the moment of its incipiency. Like his ancestors, whose violence and violation have claimed a continent and destroyed an indigenous people, David’s emotional violence and moral violations have wrought destruction, not only to others, but to himself as well” (315). David, in refusing to accept his own homosexual desire and love for Giovanni, drives Giovanni to despair which eventually leads to Giovanni murdering his boss and being sentenced to death. Henderson, then, notes that this moment in the text “constructs subjectivity as a site of mediation between the present and the past, the personal and the historical, the self and the other” (315). Interestingly, guilt and the acceptance of responsibility are what make David realize these connections, suggesting that a cosmopolitan frame of mind might be gained for America if it could only confront its violent imperial history.

Given how Baldwin represents subjectivity, Giovanni’s Room can be read as a “critical cosmopolitan text,” as Rebecca L. Walkowitz defines it in her book Cosmopolitan Style. Some of the criteria that Walkowitz outlines are that the text demonstrates an “interest[] in representing patterns or fictions of affiliation, in rejecting fixed conceptions of the local, [and] in comparing the uses and histories of global thinking” (7). Giovanni’s Room fits these criteria in that it makes explicit the connections between the personal and the social, the local and the global and works to blur the lines between them. The novel challenges David’s American cultural mores by examining their mythology. In reading Giovanni’s Room as a social commentary rather than only a personal account of expatriation, I am also following Walkowitz’s argument that “modernist writers troubled the distinction between local and global that most conceptions of exile have presupposed” (6). In revealing that David’s personal and national history are intertwined and that his nationalism follows him despite his self-imposed exile to Paris, Baldwin demonstrates how the local and global cannot be separated. Culture and nationalism are not things that belong to a
particular place but which are carried in the minds of citizens, and which affect how they interact with those of other cultures and nations. David’s exile results in not only self-discovery but a deeper understanding of how his national culture has shaped his identity. David acquires, painfully, what Gilroy calls, in Postcolonial Melancholia, the “critical knowledge of one’s own culture and society” which comes from “estrangement” (70). Though David does not purposefully use estrangement as an “ethical method,” as Gilroy suggests we should, his exile from America does result in a confrontation with his own moral actions.

**Sexuality and Race**

The questions of sexuality and gender which I examine can be applied to race as well. Many critics have noted that though Baldwin writes his main character as a white man, the novel can still be seen as a commentary on race relations in that Baldwin frequently related the homosexual’s and expatriate’s experiences of exclusion to that of the African American in his works. Robert Tomlinson makes this claim when he states,

> In Baldwin’s mapping of the American psyche, Blacks and homosexuals are the paradigm for such heroes [who recognize their tragic situation]. Caught in a double bind, the may wish…to efface their alienation, but the price of their painfully won identity lies in the retention of their difference. Thus the homosexual and expatriate experiences are made to function as paradigms for the African American experience (142).

Tomlinson explains that Baldwin’s own experiences of “alienation” were “double” in that he was an African American homosexual expatriate (137). Mae G. Henderson makes a similar argument when she states that though “blackness is erased” in the novel, we can see that “race is present”: “Baldwin focuses on the paradoxical and self-contradictory issues of subjectivity: What it is to be (white) American and expatriate; what it is to be a homosexual and a man” (313). Baldwin’s examination of subjectivity in this way enables him to make a more general statement about, as Cyraina Johnson-Roullier says, “the common plight of the oppressed, those who cannot make themselves a part of the ideas by which mainstream society is constituted” (939). In alluding to the “common plight of the oppressed,” Baldwin makes a truly cosmopolitan comment on the various ways in which societal pressures structure identity.

Beyond simply demonstrating how various forms of identity are excluded from the mainstream, Baldwin also shows through this novel how discourses of homosexuality and racial
identity are articulated through one another. Somerville argues in *Queering the Colorline* that the race science of the nineteenth century created analogies between race and sexuality that continued into the twentieth century. She states, “…questions of race—in particular the formation of notions of ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’—must be understood as a crucial part of the history and representation of sexual formations, including lesbian and gay identity and compulsory heterosexuality in the United States” (5). In creating analogies between racial and sexual identity, race science marked black and homosexual bodies as “nonnormative,” resulting in the “bifurcat[ion of] identity into ‘black’ or ‘white,’ ‘heterosexual’ or ‘homosexual’” (8-9). Baldwin exposes this construction of identity by, as Magdalena J. Zabrowska states, showing how “racism often arises from and is perpetuated by compulsory heterosexuality” (127). David’s homosexuality “is an offense against his ‘whiteness’…because American masculinity arises from prohibitions and denotes ‘white’ and ‘straight’ by precluding both homosexuality and racial otherness” (127). Baldwin’s analogy between homosexuality and race, then, is a reflection of how these aspects of “otherness” are grouped together in order to define whiteness against them. In my argument, I will make the case for how David’s homosexuality is also portrayed as an offense to his identity as an American. National identity is linked to whiteness and masculinity as well in that his participation in heterosexual reproduction is required if he is ever to return home to the U.S.

### American Myths

At the start of the novel, as David thinks about his reasons for leaving America for France, he realizes that he was hoping to flee his country and his sexuality but that this attempt has ultimately failed because he could not escape himself. Disrupting the trope of the “innocent abroad,” David explains that while he tried to convince Giovanni (and himself) that he had never slept with a boy before, Joey was actually his first homosexual encounter and his reason for leaving America. Disgusted at his own desire for Joey who “is a boy,” he began what he calls his “flight.” Speaking from experience, however, David realizes that he was not able to escape from his desire or from himself as he had hoped. He states,

---

37 Henderson states, in “Expatriation, Homosexual Panic, and Man’s Estate” (*Callaloo* 23.1, 2000), “In the end it is not the European Giovanni who has corrupted David, but David, the American who has misled and deceived not only Giovanni, but himself and others as well. The traditional Jamesian theme thus undergoes an ironic reversal: the American corrupts the European, and not so much through experience as through an inability to accept the consequences of experience” (321).
My flight may, indeed, have begun that summer—which does not tell me where to find the germ of the dilemma which resolved itself, that summer, into flight. Of course, it is somewhere before me, locked into that reflection I am watching in the window as the night comes down outside. It is trapped in the room with me, always has been, and always will be, and is yet more foreign to me than those foreign hills outside. (227)

David ultimately finds that “the dilemma” is within himself, in his reflection. Though he had attempted to align that desire with Joey and therefore force it away from himself and onto the Other, he must ultimately accept that his desire has followed him across the globe. It may be, in fact, that he went to France knowing subconsciously that he would have more of a chance at homosexual encounters than he would in America. His use of the word “foreign” here marks the conflation of his sexual and national identity. As an American, for whom homosexuality should be entirely unacceptable, this desire within himself is “foreign,” and something which he tried to blame first on Joey and later on Giovanni but which he now realizes is a part of himself which he cannot escape.

This reversal of the “innocent abroad” trope is just the beginning of a number of American myths which we see dispelled throughout the text. It is frequently Giovanni who counters David’s beliefs, allowing the reader, if not David himself, to see the contradictions in his American ways of thinking about himself and the world. One of these myths is David’s insistence that Americans are irrevocably different from Europeans. In David’s first conversation with Giovanni, Giovanni states, “I don’t see why the world is so new for Americans….After all, you are all merely emigrants. And you did not leave Europe so very long ago” (247). David insists that Americans “have led different lives than you, things have happened to us there which have never happened here” (247). Giovanni’s response interestingly asserts the differences as well but in a way which suggests that Americans are not essentially different but because they like to think of themselves as different: “‘Ah! If it had only made you a different people!’ he laughed. ‘But it seems to have turned you into another species. You are not, are you, on another planet?’” (247). His comment emphasizes the extent to which Americans see themselves as above other humans, “another species,” and do not consider themselves to be a part of the global community with his question of whether they come from another planet.

Another way in which Giovanni says that Americans see themselves as separate from the rest of the world is through their concept of time and history. He says to David,

‘The Americans are funny. You have a funny sense of time—or perhaps you have no sense of time at all, I can’t tell. Time always sounds like a parade *chez vous*—a triumphant parade, like armies with banners entering a town. As though, with enough time, and that would not need to be so very much for Americans, *n’est-ce pas?* …as though with enough time and all that fearful energy and virtue you people have, everything will be settled, solved, put in its place. And when I say everything,…I mean all the serious, dreadful things, like pain and death and love, in which you Americans do not believe.’ (247)

Giovanni points to the American sense of history which is often read as a history of triumph and a history which proves that all things will come out all right in the end. Giovanni thinks that Americans’ view of both history and of the future is skewed, giving Americans a sense of themselves which to Giovanni seems inhuman. Given the earlier allusion to the United States’ imperial history, the “triumphant parade” may be yet another reference to the American’s vision of themselves as heroic conquerors. Giovanni also likely alludes to the United States’ view of itself following WWII. The Paris setting would suggest that Giovanni is referring to the Americans’ portrayal of themselves as the saviors of France. In contrast, Giovanni, as an Italian, knows what it means to face defeat and destruction in the wake of WWII.

Paul Gilroy’s analysis of Levi-Strauss in *Postcolonial Melancholia* illuminates the degree to which Giovanni’s statement about different conceptions of time and the American vision of a progressive history is still relevant today. In Gilroy’s reading of Levi-Strauss he notes that in using “temporality as the medium of differentiation, it has the unintended consequence of making everybody the same but them rearranging them in a historical sequence that rationalizes differences and their conflicts by suggesting they are all in progressive motion toward the same ultimate destination. Some groups then represent the past of others…” (66). Giovanni’s reminder to David that the “New World” is not so new after all undermines the American progressive sense of history which relegates Europe to the past and itself to the future. Of course, we can see how this different sense of time continues to work in our own age when we realize that the “First World” and “Third World” can exist simultaneously. Gilroy believes that overcoming “temporality as the medium of differentiation” is one of the keys to cosmopolitanism: “The
challenge of multiculturalism can be defined...in the idea of bringing these diverse groups into the same present and the project of fusing their horizons so that the possibility of a common future becomes conceivable” (66). America’s different sense of time, as Giovanni tells it, makes it so that Americans cannot conceive of a “common future” with other peoples or nations.

The notion that Americans cannot foresee a common future with peoples of other nations is demonstrated through the fact that David’s homophobia, which is a product of his belief in national imperatives of heteronormativity and masculinity, keeps David from having a future with Giovanni. Though David does become intimate with Giovanni, he cannot picture having a lasting relationship with any man. Despite the fact that David is in a place where homosexuality is more accepted than in America, he cannot forget the fact that “it is a crime—in my country and, after all, I didn’t grow up here, I grew up there” (286). This statement emphasizes David’s inability to reject American values despite his current estrangement from his country. The national narrative of heteronormativity is also represented when David’s father informs him that if he wants to inherit his father’s estate back in America, he must marry a woman. Essentially, if he comes out with his homosexuality, he cannot go home. Of course, the idea that one should marry and have a family is not solely an American ideal but one that is shared by peoples of many nations. David is also told by an Italian housekeeper that what he needs is a good woman to take care of him (276).

David’s deep belief in the security of heteronormativity and its association for him with home can be seen when, while he is with Giovanni, he thinks, “I ached abruptly, intolerably, with a longing to go home .... I saw myself, sharply, as a wanderer, an adventurer, rocking through the world, unanchored. I looked at Giovanni’s face, which did not help me”(271). In David’s mind, Giovanni cannot be an anchor for him because Giovanni is a man; he comforts himself by thinking that his relationship with Giovanni is only one of lust and not of affection. David decides to marry Hella because, as he says, “I wanted to be inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman put my children to bed....I wanted a woman to be for me a steady ground, like the earth itself, where I could always be renewed” (305). Again, homosexuality is related to exile and heterosexuality with home for David. The key to David’s association of marriage with security is in the phrase “with my manhood unquestioned” (305). His understanding of masculinity and the role of a man means that, for him, if he were to stay with Giovanni, he would have to play the role of housewife, a role unsuitable
for a man. He says to Giovanni, “What kind of a life can we have in this room?—this filthy little room. What kind of a life can two me have together, anyway?...You want to go out and be the big laborer and bring home the money and you want me to stay here and wash the dishes and cook the food and clean this miserable closet of a room and kiss you when you come in through that door and lie with you at night and be your little girl” (337). Giovanni, on the other hand, sees through this statement, knowing full well that they could have a lasting relationship if David could only let go of his fears and, as he says, “the mythology of your country” (337): “‘You know very well,’ said Giovanni, slowly, ‘what can happen between us. It is for that reason you are leaving me’” (338).

What Giovanni does realize, and what David does not at this moment, is that David’s dream of safety within the heteronormative world is a fantasy itself, a lie that he and others have been told. It seems that David’s chances of having a meaningful and lasting relationship with Hella are not likely either. In fact, even after Giovanni is out of David’s life, Hella still finds out that David is attracted to men and ends their marriage plans. Also, Hella’s reasons for marrying David are because she too wants to have her gender role confirmed. She says to David, “I’ve got you to take care of and feed and torment and trick and love—I’ve got you to put up with. From now on, I can have a wonderful time complaining about being a woman. But I won’t be terrified that I’m not one” (324). As an intelligent woman with short hair and who dates likes a man, Hella fears that she is not a woman. Like David, Hella wants to be married because it will allow her to feel secure in her gender role.

The fact that the heterosexual family does not really offer security is alluded to several times in the book. At one point, Giovanni reveals to David that in Italy he had a wife and a son, but that his son died as a baby. He describes how this tragedy caused him to leave Italy for good: “I had just buried my baby in the churchyard where my father and father’s fathers were and I had left my girl screaming in my mother’s house. Yes, I had made a baby but it was born dead” (335). Giovanni realizes that death can come even in the security of you home village. This story may also act, though, as an allegory representing why homosexuality is not accepted by the nation. In his essay “Preservation of Innocence,” Baldwin writes: “We arrive at the oldest, the most insistent and the most vehement charge faced by the homosexual: he is unnatural because he has turned from his life-giving function to a union which is sterile” (15). Giovanni’s comment that he buried his baby son “in the churchyard where my father and father’s fathers were”
suggests that he has failed to carry on the line and has therefore failed at his natural duty as a man. The fact, though, that this failure occurs when he is with a woman, demonstrates that it is not only homosexual relationships which can fail to produce an offspring. Additionally, the woman who says that what David needs is a wife, tells him that she lost her three sons in the war, suggesting that the nation can actually interfere with its citizens’ security and ability to reproduce.

The mythology of the “naturalness” of the heterosexual family and duty to reproduce is also demonstrated by the fact that both gender and nationality are shown to be performative. As Zabowroska aptly notes, David feels that in order to maintain his identity as an American in Europe, he must also portray himself as a heterosexual male, revealing that both his nationality and his masculinity are a performance (121). In fact, David seems to associate himself with a group of cosmopolitan gay men in Paris so that he can prove his manhood and his Americanness. While he thinks of himself as different from Jacques and the other gay men (particularly the transsexual men) at the bar, it turns out that he is not so different from them. Jacques, who is a businessman and once lived in America, sees right through David’s performance. When David refuses to approach Giovanni, Jacques states, “‘I was not suggesting that you jeopardize, even for a moment, that...immaculate manhood which is your pride and joy’ (244). The fact that Jacques can see through his performance and the fact that David feels himself attracted to Giovanni despite himself means that his identity as a man and as an American are in jeopardy. While his masculinity and nationality are performative, Baldwin represents his sexuality as instinctive: “I knew I could do nothing whatever to stop the ferocious excitement which had burst in me like a storm. I could only drink, in the faint hope that the storm might thus spend itself without doing any more damage to my land….I was only sorry that Jacques had been a witness” (254). His desire for Giovanni is likened to a storm which threatens his land, America. He is angry that Jacques has observed his lust for Giovanni because he knows that it is only proof of what Jacques has known about him all along.

Can One Be an American and a Cosmopolitan?

While Baldwin does expose the performative nature of masculinity and nationality, the fact that David is unable to give up his cultural norms despite Giovanni’s trying to convince him otherwise demonstrates the strong hold that these norms have over an individual. The rules of
home continue to haunt David even when he is far away in Paris. The inability to let go of home, though, makes it impossible for David to imagine a future and therefore have a future with Giovanni. He cannot picture Giovanni as a person who he could have a home with and so remains an American tourist, someone who intends to only visit temporarily and not to put down roots. Giovanni describes David as a tourist in a way which I think is integral to Baldwin’s depiction of Americans and their ability to form meaningful relations with others. Giovanni describes what he can imagine having happened if he had stayed in his native village in Italy:

‘I can see you, many years from now, coming through our village in the ugly, fat, American motor car you will surely have by then and looking at me and looking at all of us and tasting our wine and shitting on us with those empty smiles Americans wear everywhere and which you wear all the time and driving off with a great roar of the motors and a great sound of tires and telling all the other Americans you meet that they must come and see our village because it is so picturesque. And you will have no idea of the life there, dripping and bursting and beautiful and terrible, as you have no idea of my life now’ (334).

Giovanni pictures David as an American tourist who, in his intrusive motor car, gains only a superficial understanding of the country he is visiting and the people who inhabit it. The motor car implies both superiority, in terms of the American’s advanced technology and wealth, and a detachment in that the village is viewed from the safe distance of the motor car. The idea that David, as an American, will tell others to come and see the “picturesque” village implies that the American tourist simply reinforces the clichéd view of Italy that Americans already have. Giovanni compares his vision of David’s aloofness as a tourist to his emotional distance in their relationship. David’s tourist attitude is described as a kind of sexual tourism by Giovanni’s boss, who tells Giovanni that David is just an “American boy, after all, doing things in France which [he] would not dare do at home” (308). David takes a tourist approach to their relationship in that he intends for it not to last and to not have it affect him in the long run. Giovanni feels that despite their love affair, that David feels no more attached to him now than he did when they first met. The fact that they did meet, and that Giovanni did not stay in Italy but moved to Paris, shows the potential that their meeting held. By coming together and not remaining distant strangers, with David as the gazing tourist and Giovanni as an object within the landscape,
means that there was the potential for a connection between them, but David’s inability to let go of his social mores seems to have ruined that chance.

Baldwin, in his essay “A Question of Identity,” describes American expatriate students in Paris in a similar way to how he has Giovanni describe David in this scene. Baldwin says of the American student in Paris that “since the reasons which brought the student here are so romantic, and incoherent, he has come, in effect, to a city which exists only in his mind. He cushions himself, so it would seem against the shock of reality, by refusing for a very long time to recognize Paris at all, but clinging instead to its image. This is the reason, perhaps, that Paris for so long fails to make any mark on him…” (127). Just as the American tourist leaves Italy with little notion of what life in Italy is actually like, Baldwin explains that the American student comes to Paris with a “romantic” notion of it and then holds on to that “image,” not allowing himself to learn anything new about the city. Baldwin demonstrates that travel to another country does not necessarily guarantee that one will truly learn about another culture or question the values of his own culture. As Bruce Robbins puts it, there is “no inherent value in transnationality” (11). For Baldwin, the fact that the American does not really understand Paris or Parisians has a real consequence because of the “aura of power” that Americans have. He states, “This is the ‘catch,’ for the American, in the Paris freedom: that he becomes here a kind of revenant to Europe, the future of which continent, it may be, is in his hands” (130). If we read David and Giovanni’s relationship as also having consequences for the relations between the nations that they represent, then we can see that David’s inability to truly love Giovanni and the subsequent havoc that this wrecks on Giovanni’s life demonstrates America’s power to influence the future of Europe.

Ironically, in trying to adhere to the moral conventions of his country, David betrays the cosmopolitan values of treating others as fellow human beings. Giovanni states, “You want to despise Giovanni because he is not afraid of the stink of love. You want to kill him in the name of all your lying little moralities. And you—you are immoral. You are, by far, the most immoral man I have met in all my life. Look, look what you have done to me” (337). David’s “lying little

39 “A Question of Identity” is from Notes of a Native Son (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).
41 In Martha Nussbaum’s reading of Kant, she defines one of the central values of the cosmopolitan: “…they must also, and centrally, learn to recognize humanity wherever they encounter it, undeterred by traits that are strange to them…” (9). See Nussbaum’s essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” in For Love of Country (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).
moralities” cause him to fear his homosexuality and therefore to not only reject Giovanni but to wish to kill him. The fear of betraying cultural mores results in the greater moral transgression of desiring the destruction of another. Though David does not kill Giovanni himself, he does feel, at the end of the novel, that he is responsible for the events which lead up to Giovanni’s death penalty. Martha Nussbaum asserts that what keeps one person from treating another as human are often those traits of the Other which are “strange to them” (9). Baldwin demonstrates here that what is “strange” to David are those qualities such as sexuality which are common to human nature. His fears about sexuality seem to come from his American Puritan values. As Henderson states, “…David represents a construction of whiteness and maleness that rests upon a conception of human nature that derives fundamentally from an American Puritanical heritage associated with the repression and sinfulness of the body” (321). Because David’s own conception of what is human denies sexual desire, he sees Giovanni’s openness about his sexuality as monstrous. The book demonstrates that, in fact, Giovanni’s desires are natural and human; what keeps David from treating Giovanni as a human being is his inability to accept himself as human. Giovanni says to David,

“You never have loved anyone, I am sure you never will! You love your purity, you love your mirror—you are just like a little virgin, you walk around with your hands in front of you as though there were some precious metal, gold, silver, rubies, maybe diamonds down there between your legs! You will never give it to anybody, you will never let anybody touch it—man or woman’ (336).

Though Giovanni says here that David will never let anyone “touch” him, what he seems to mean is not physical touch (for it is clear that he and David have had sexual relations) but emotional intimacy. His inability to love Giovanni is a sign of his inability to love any human being. His desire to protect his “purity,” essentially his inability to accept that he has human desires, will keep him from ever being able to truly love another. Baldwin demonstrates that perhaps rather than loving the other as we love ourselves, that we need to love the other better than we do ourselves.

The Possibilities of Love

Though it may seem that David’s rejection of Giovanni forecloses the possibilities of love relationships that cross boundaries of sexuality, gender, and nationality—what I am reading as the possibility to forge cosmopolitan bonds—there are moments in the text where we see the possibilities that love holds, even if love’s potential does not come to fruition within the text. Giovanni’s reference to “touch” in the statement I quoted in the previous paragraph is reminiscent of a comment made earlier in the novel by Jacques to David before he becomes involved with Giovanni. Jacques, whose sexual affairs with boys David despises, explains that what is lacking from his relations with men is love: “You think…that my life is shameful because my encounters are. And they are. You should ask yourself why they are….Because there is no affection in them, and no joy. It’s like putting an electric plug in a dead socket. Touch, but no contact. All touch, but no contact and no light” (266). Jacques tries to explain to him that he has gotten into this pattern of meaningless relationships by not allowing himself to love. He warns David that in feeling “ashamed” of his desire for Giovanni and in fearing that a relationship with Giovanni “may change [him]” that he will end up unhappy, like Jacques himself: “But you can make your time together anything but dirty, you can give each other something which will make both of you better—forever—if you will not be ashamed, if you will only not play it safe….You play it safe long enough…and you’ll end up trapped in your own dirty body…like me” (267). Despite this warning, David remains ashamed of his sexuality and his relationship with Giovanni. David thinks that homosexuality is inherently shameful, but as Jacques says, it is his feelings of shame and unwillingness to allow the relationship to change him that makes the relationship shameful and meaningless. As Henderson states, “What perverts the homosexual relationship…is not the nature of its love but the absence of love” (321). The novel suggests that believing in the possibilities of love to create change is the first step toward that possibility being actualized. As Jacques says, rather poetically, “…your father or mine, should have told us that not many people have ever died of love. But multitudes have perished, and are perishing every hour…for the lack of it” (268). Jacques’ reference to the “multitudes,” suggests that love has the potential to heal not only personal relationships but also problems around the globe.

We can also see some hope for love in the ending of the novel when it becomes apparent that despite David’s best efforts, Giovanni has changed him. David’s acceptance of his moral
responsibility in Giovanni’s death suggests that David can no longer blame Giovanni for his own sexual desire. Henderson’s reading of the text through Kristeva and Butler’s theories of the Other is useful here. Henderson rightly claims that David projects his homosexual desires onto Giovanni and his room so that he may believe that these desires are not a part of himself:

“Associated with images of dirtiness, disorder, and decomposition, Giovanni’s room, functioning as a kind of objective correlative to his emotions and fears in relation to his own body and sex, embodies all that from which David so desperately flees” (319). Zaborowska reads Joey in a similar way to how Henderson interprets Giovanni and Giovanni’s room in that Zaborowska sees Joey as “a symbol for [David’s] repression and self-hatred. He is rejected and dismissed as the other and absorbs David’s repressed guilt, fear and paranoia; he is the other, the non-identity that purchases David’s immaculate manhood” (128). While Zaborowska reads Joey and Giovanni as similar in that they are both othered and sacrificed for the sake of David’s self-denial, I would add that though they are both sacrificed, Giovanni’s annihilation is different from that of Joey in that David must finally accept the consequences of his relationship with Giovanni. In the end, David must “at last and unavoidably, come to terms with homoerotic desire. His relationship with Giovanni exposes the falseness and the guilt underlying David’s seeming innocence” (Henderson 321). David cannot blame Giovanni for his own homosexual desire but must accept responsibility for his own corruption of Giovanni rather than the other way around, which as Henderson explains is a reversal of the typical Jamesian theme in which the European corrupts the American (321). Cyraina Johnson-Roullier explains that Giovanni’s death disintegrates David’s illusions about himself, leading to his realization, which I quoted earlier, that he cannot flee his homosexual desire as he had tried to when he left America. Unlike his encounter with Joey, David cannot dismiss his relationship with Giovanni as some passing fling.

Another sign that Giovanni has had a lasting impression upon David is the fact that Giovanni haunts his memories, suggesting that Giovanni is no longer a separate entity from himself. He states, “…it had not occurred to me until that instant that, in fleeing his body, I confirmed and perpetuated his body’s power over me. Now, as though I had been branded, his body was burned into my mind, into my dreams” (339). He also says, at an earlier point in the novel, “…I must confess: I loved him. I do not think that I will ever love anyone like that again”

---

43 Johnson-Roullier states, in “(An)Other Modernism,” “David finds himself utterly alone. In this situation, he is unable to continue the self-deception that originally brought him to this pass” (949).
David finally admits, though too late, that Giovanni has changed him, “branded him,” and that he did in fact love Giovanni even if he was unable to show it at the time. As a sign of both his guilt and his feeling that Giovanni and he are one, David imagines that he too is on death row, saying, “My executioners are here with me, walking up and down with me…” (311), and later picturing what Giovanni will go through when his executioners come for him. Perhaps the most telling sign that Giovanni has forever changed David is found in the last two lines of the novel. When he leaves his house in the South of France, he takes with him a letter from Jacques explaining that Giovanni has been executed, but then tears it up: “…I take the blue envelope which Jacques has sent me and tear it slowly into many pieces, watching them dance in the wind, watching the wind carry them away. Yet, as I turn and begin walking toward the waiting people, the wind blows some of them back on me” (360). Johnson-Roullier aptly reads this scene as a sign of the “impossibility of escape from the damage he has done to his personal integrity through the destruction caused by his self-deception, that David must also bear with him forever the memory of Giovanni…” (950). To return to Carla Kaplan’s reading of Nella Larsen’s *Passing* as denying the possibility for ‘undesirable desire’ to truly exist, we might say that *Giovanni’s Room* is, in the end, different from *Passing*. *Giovanni’s Room* allows us to see the effect that the death of the beloved has on David, allowing space for David to accept the consequences of his actions and finally realize that his love for Giovanni has, as Jacques’ suggested it would, changed him forever. The novel seems to demonstrate that, as Kwame Appiah says, “Above all, relationships are changing” (103).

Though Baldwin’s novel clearly does not have a happy ending, as does *Dark Princess*, the possibility for lasting bonds to be created between people of differing nations, cultures, and value systems exists and is a desirable alternative to the sadness and guilt which blow back in David’s face. Baldwin allows us to see that the possibility for happiness with Giovanni existed but that David’s fears lead him to deny that possibility. David’s rejection of Giovanni leads to catastrophic effects and still does not enable him to live out his fantasy of a stable heterosexual relationship. Baldwin’s portrayal of how various forms of identity interrelate—race, sexuality, gender, nationality—allows us to see how this relationship between David and Giovanni is analogous to the difficulties of crossing cultural boundaries in other relationships. Baldwin’s suggestion that David’s Americanism presents one of the greatest barriers to having a lasting relationship with Giovanni, provides us with incite into how the American sense of superiority
may make it particularly difficult for the U.S. to create egalitarian relationships with other countries.
Conclusion

I am fully aware that in my reading of these texts as cosmopolitan, that I may be accused of optimism. I accept the charge because optimism is, I believe, an integral part of cosmopolitan thought. In order to believe in the possibilities of cosmopolitanism, we must believe that individuals are capable of overcoming their subject positions, of wanting and trying to understand the Other even though they may never fully understand, and of accepting their responsibility in how their local actions may have global affects. Cosmopolitanism is not, though, a blind optimism for it should also function as a form of critical thinking. As Amanda Anderson states, “Although this optimism [of cosmopolitan texts] can appear at time to shade into cultivated naiveté, it is often an acutely self-conscious departure from prevailing practices of negative critique, and moreover is often offset by a sophisticated attentiveness to geopolitical and multicultural complexities” (269).

Du Bois’ *Dark Princess* is a prime example of this tempered optimism in that though the ending of his book presents us with a utopian imagined community, the novel also details the complications of trying to bring people of various backgrounds together. In following Du Bois example, I have tried to not only examine my selected texts for how they can act as examples of cosmopolitan thought and how they deal with the complexities of cosmopolitanism but also to pay close attention to the moments when these artists falter in their attempts, falling into a limited universalism or a monolithic portrayal of a certain culture or race. I think that we can learn just as much from where a cosmopolitan project fails as from where it succeeds. I also believe that we should take seriously the attempt to help others who are distant from our homes, as Du Bois and the Pool film group do, and not to entirely dismiss them on the basis of their faults.

In chapter one, I argued that Du Bois’ novel *Dark Princess* can teach us about the delicate balance of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. We learn from Matthew Townes and Katuliya when we need to cross over national boundaries to create international coalitions as well as when nationalist tendencies need to be kept in check. We also see that Matthew’s and Katuliya’s particular experiences in their own countries and knowledge of their country’s histories can help rather than hinder them in forming coalitions. Though Du Bois does place his concern for African Americans at the center of his cosmopolitan novel and take an Orientalist
view of India, we can also see that his efforts to connect the troubles of African Americans with other oppressed peoples in the world is a far step beyond most of his contemporaries.

In the second chapter, in which I examined *Borderline*, we see that blurring national boundaries can be useful in understanding that racism is a global problem rather than a merely local one. The film demonstrates that the Western world, with its history of slavery and of imperialism, participates in the continuing discourse of racism. It reveals how concepts about gender and sexuality, including the taboo of miscegenation, help to reinforce racism. With all of its good intentions, the film certainly has its faults. The filmmaker’s reliance on primitivism, in portraying African Americans as aligned with nature and as an alternative to the mania of modernity, ultimately reinforce an essentialist idea of race. We can learn from the film that even anti-racist efforts can be racist, and that the aspect of cosmopolitanism that emphasizes an understanding of culture as non-monolithic is of the upmost importance if we are to avoid the pitfalls of humanism. Through my comparison of the film to Nancy Cunard’s “Black Man and White Ladyship,” I hoped to convey that not all white modernists discuss racism in the same way, and that *Borderline*’s creator’s acceptance of their own and everyone’s participation in racism sets it apart.

Finally, in the third chapter, my analysis of *Giovanni’s Room* exposes Baldwin’s critique of how being an American can hinder our ability to see others as human because the engrained social morals of racism and homophobia can keep us from seeing ourselves as human. The relationship between David and Giovanni acts as a microcosm of America’s relation to the world, as the scene describing David as an American tourist shows. Though Baldwin does write his main character as a white man, the novel still demonstrates how racism functions in the twentieth century through its references to heterosexual reproduction. In the end, though, Baldwin’s novel has a glimmer of hope in that the main character accepts his responsibility in harming Giovanni and realizes that he cannot push the blame for his homosexuality onto Giovanni any longer. He accepts that he brought his homosexuality and his American notions about it to Europe with him, and that any amount of travel will not enable him to escape his humanity. The novel suggests that in order to accept that others are human we must first see ourselves as human, with all of our faults included.

The lessons of these texts are particularly important in today’s global age. At a time when, as David Palumbo-Liu claims, there has been a “resurgence of national-character
thinking” against the cultural others which we have identified in response to September 11th (114), an understanding of how nationalism, and American nationalism in particular, is or is not congruent with cosmopolitanism is essential. Each of the artists of these texts has a different take on American nationalism. For Du Bois, at least at this point in his career, the main character’s experiences as an African American enable him to take on the racist statements of the members of a transnational coalition; at the same time, his Americanism is kept in check in that Du Bois rejects the idea of America as hero to the world. In Borderline, the creators target American racism in a European setting, enabling them to both counter America’s particular brand of racism while still indicting European racism as well. James Baldwin makes perhaps the most scathing criticism of American nationalism in that it is the main character’s identity as an American, and the homophobia that accompanies that identity, which prevents him from being able to accept his own sexuality and leads him to discount the humanity of himself and his lover. I hope that my thesis will pave the way for more studies of how particular brands of nationalism relate to cosmopolitanism. It is also my hope is that we can learn from these texts how people can build international and intercultural coalitions without depending on the State. As Gilroy suggests, perhaps through a thorough examination of the West’s imperial and racist history, we can cultivate a sense of commonality based on the responsibility that all Western nations have in this history.

Just as national mores may present barriers to cosmopolitanism, so can the barrier of race. Though we, as scholars, recognize that the notion of race was constructed to the benefit of white interests, we must realize that racism is still prevalent—perhaps even more prevalent considering its new and varied forms—and a significant impediment to seeing others as fellow human beings. It is for this reason that I have purposefully included texts which make the effort to reach across the colorline. Though Du Bois does strive to unite the “dark peoples” of the world, the basis for this coalition is based less on their skin color than it is on their shared history of oppression. Though the other characters in the book are appalled at the union of Matthew and Katuliya because of their different ethnic backgrounds, they see themselves as having a good deal in common. Du Bois demonstrates as well how their differences can be a help rather than a hindrance in that they offer one another differing perspectives. The white modernists of Borderline, despite their clear mistakes, sought to work in collaboration with Paul and Eslanda Robeson on the film and to understand how racism shapes the lives of black people. Through
their own understanding of how society constructs sexual identity, H.D., Macpherson, and Bryher were able to show how similar strictures exclude African Americans from subjectivity. Baldwin’s text, in which he writes as a white man, also shows how certain forms of oppression are analogous. Through his own experiences of isolation due to his homosexuality, race, and expatriation help him to articulate how these various positions are not the same but overlap. Perhaps we can learn from these texts how to see ourselves as having a common bond with others while still maintaining a sense of important cultural difference.

At a time when globalization has made it impossible to ignore our international connections and yet has also brought the differences between us into strong relief, we need to consider how cosmopolitanism can help us to interact in more ethical ways. My selected texts from the mid-twentieth century—a time when the barriers of race and nationality were seemingly insurmountable—demonstrate how we can combine our local loyalties with a worldly perspective. Whether or not we should emphasize our particularities in a given situation depends upon power relations. In the case of oppressed peoples, as Du Bois’ *Dark Princess* demonstrates, the emphasis on differences from the majority can help them to assert their humanitarian rights. In the case of people who are in a position of power, as *Borderline* and Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* exemplify, adopting a worldly perspective can aid us in understanding how our privileged position has been enabled by the exploitation of others. Through their modernist questioning of identity construction and sense of double-consciousness, each of these texts demonstrates how we can use our shared experiences of cultural exclusion, whatever form they may take, in order to better understand our commonalities. My reading of these modernist texts suggests that in addition to feminism and socialism, which formed political affiliations across national boundaries, an anti-colonial and anti-racist stance can also add in creating cross-cultural coalitions. Recognizing the importance of anti-colonialism and anti-racism allows us to see the significant place that African American authors and interracial modernist works hold in the evolution of cosmopolitan thought in the twentieth century.


H.D. “Borderline: A Pool Film with Paul Robeson.” Donald 221-236.


Macpherson, Kenneth. “As Is.” Donald 236-238.


Nussbaum, Martha C. “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism.” Cohen 1-17.


