

Worlding Modernism: The Political, the Postcolonial, and the Modern Body

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Abstract

This dissertation contends that the population one belongs to shapes their relation to the modern state. State laws and power structures allow lives to flourish, or neglect people or kill them, based on classifications of race, gender, and species that are imagined to have definite biological boundaries. This political domination over life is inscribed within global twentieth-century literature, and when read in this light, a *biopolitics* of modern literature emerges. The project breaks new ground in the analysis of transatlantic, multicultural literature, reading works of American, British, African, and Caribbean literature together for the first time and through a new theoretical lens, and in doing so unmaking the Eurocentrism and whiteness that have long structured the field of biopolitical theory. I engage with texts from Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, to Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, to Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Virginia Woolf's *Flush*. These works are read alongside theory and philosophy from foundational biopolitical thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, but—crucially—these perspectives are revised by working with diverse theorists such as Achille Mbembe, Jemima Repo, and Alexander Weheliye, who have brought much-needed attention to the raced and gendered dynamics of biopolitics. In doing so, I make it possible to re-see how racism, sexism, and dehumanization have coincided to shape twentieth-century literature and politics. The biopolitical tensions uncovered in my texts reveal that the lives represented in modern global literature are managed by a politics that sorts bodies into differently valued groups. My approach demonstrates that, far from being amendable blemishes on global politics, racism and sexism are the very foundation for the political order we know. This perspective enables me to analyze

works of modernist literature in completely new ways—*worlding* modernism by rethinking its geography as well as its capacity to change the knowledge and politics that compose our worlds. Throughout, the project underscores the ethical force of literary study by asserting how literature fosters social equity and makes us capable of responding anew to racism, slavery, and colonialism as I look toward a new politics and ethics of global hospitality.

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Introduction: Worlding Modernism

This dissertation project emerges from a simple aim: to take seriously the way *the world* is deployed in modernist and postcolonial literature. “The world” is a phrase that is often used offhandedly in literature, as well as in criticism and philosophy, but my contention is that by paying new attention to this usage there might emerge a new understanding of precisely what constitutes the worlds of modernist and postcolonial life and its representation. This includes especially how different experiences of modernity, of race and racism, of gender and sexism, and of history and possibility shape the worlds found in art. Taking this approach means first of all that where one encounters “the world,” it is truly only *a* world among many. My gambit is that examining the variety of experiences of the world, while still taking each seriously as a meaningful presentation of a certain totality in time and place, can engender a rethinking of our ethical responsibilities for the world and the lives lived in it. In this way, this project maps a series of strategies for rethinking the politics of modernist literature, reinjecting modernism with a contemporary political aptness for addressing the worlds made and lived under ongoing conditions of structural racism and sexism. This involves both rereading canonical texts through a theoretical framework that is new to them, and dismantling the stubborn Euro/American-centrism and whiteness that have long clung to modernism. It also involves developing ethical responses to the conditions of our contemporary world from out of this engagement with literature. This will mean developing a certain hospitality to difference within a field of study (modernism) that has historically been rather set in its canonical ways, despite its experimental

narratives and diversity of written perspectives being well-suited to comprising a discipline with more permeable boundaries.

My focus will be on how worlds are experienced: this approach to the worlds represented in twentieth-century global literature, and the worlds that constitute our different ways of living in modernity, is primarily phenomenological.¹ I am concerned with how we encounter our world, brushing up against its limits and experiencing its rules, in life and in literature. As I apply the notion throughout, “the world”—or, more exactly, “a world”—is the accumulated sense of the rules that structure one’s life. My world is shaped by the capabilities I have: I can vote in an election, I can drive a car, I can purchase a gun, if I desire. And it is shaped by the prohibitions I encounter and am informed about: I cannot compel another to vote for my favored candidate, I cannot run red lights, I cannot brandish a weapon at others. These conditions, of course, change based on one’s position. If, instead of being a white American man, I was a woman in Saudi Arabia, for instance, that list would look quite different.

Although these examples, as straightforward laws, might seem to mesh with what we would call the rules of “reality,” our world is not interchangeable with our reality, though it overlaps with it. Many laws that structure our worlds operate internally, rather than out in the “real world.” Although there is no legal injunction against my running for president—and indeed we are incessantly told in the US that anyone can—I know that because of my class, profession, and apolitical family history, such an attempt is effectively forbidden. More to the point, consider how structural racism forces the internalization of “laws” that are “in reality” illegal—how the threat of lynching prohibited equal social engagement by Black Americans in the post

¹ In comparison, for example, to a primarily ontological understanding of worlds, like that articulated by Arturo Escobar (e.g. 73-4).

slavery south, for instance, or how willful disinvestment in African American communities continues to thwart the social mobility that is supposedly core to American values.

So the world is not only what can or cannot be done as directed by those around us, or what we bump into in reality. This texture, uncertainty, and endless discoverability of the world also highlights the ways in which our worlds are not static. Nor are their rules and possibilities only something we receive from others—our passions, interests, and activism also shape the way we experience the world. When our world changes in a drastic way, whether because of our own decisions and actions or because of another's, it becomes productive (if a bit unwieldy) to cast this process as *worlding*. Worlding speaks to our capacity to live in and experience the world differently, to find that it has or cause it to have different rules and boundaries—though not necessarily more desirable ones.

Typically, the world is seen as what is ubiquitous—it even describes the ubiquitous. This world is a commonplace, and it is the common place. It finds itself casually involved in popular discourse, where it functions seamlessly as a stand-in for the globe, or the earth, for a notion of spatiality that can only describe a tangible totality that it would be rather puzzling to question. The world is banal. It is what there is. But when thought as a way of framing our lived positions, the world cannot be purely a notion of space or place, like the globe or the earth. These notions name relatively determinate, exterior objects. We form our world as we move about the globe, as we traverse the earth, but ultimately the world comes to me in the form of experiences and knowledges accrued in place as they harden into my internal sense of what's possible.

Yet the world constantly retreats before us, and what constitutes it is far more than what we might describe as our reality. The world is what is always and most pressingly in danger of being lost, of ending. “The end of the world” describes a specter equally ecological, (science)

fictional, Christian, philosophical. It also describes a place itself, one always beyond the horizon—the world’s end, the edge of the world, the ends of the earth. And it can contain at once different valences of both, as in Anna Tsing’s work—the coming to a close of a way in which the world has been understood and exploited, alongside the prospect of a place we might look for the coming into being of a new world. Or, perhaps the world in fact does not exist at all, as Markus Gabriel argues. That is (more specifically), “*the world does not exist,*” though “there do exist *infinitely many worlds*” (65). Or again, perhaps this singular world, this “closed totality” (ibid.) which is more than spatial, did at one point exist, but it has become so fragmented and pluralized as to be irrecoverable: “There is no longer any world,” as “a composed and complete order” (Nancy, *Sense of the World* 4). Maybe there has never been a world, nothing that we would *recognize* as the world, the world itself being what we might call the unrecognizable. Yet we do continuously perceive a world in its various forms, the world as a form, and those forms we encounter within the world seem to possess a great capacity for changing the form we perceive to be the world itself (Levine 70).

There is a place for a thorough genealogy of “the world”—its historical function, its spatial organizational capacities, the trajectory of its operations in the organization or disorganization of knowledge and power. This project is not such an undertaking, at least not directly. Instead, I confine myself to the following: taking seriously that the/a world, where it is found, signifies something rather than nothing (or a nothing that is something), what might this world have to say to us now, politically? The world has an uneven texture, and an inescapable historical and political aspect. For this reason, the nineteenth-century imperialist vision of the world that Cecil Rhodes spoke of in emphasizing that “your trade is the world, and your life is

the world, and not England” (qtd. in Millin 175),² is different—but not drastically different—from a twenty-first-century perspective of the United States as “the world’s most dominant economic and military power,” whose “cultural imprint spans the world” (“Power”).³ There is a different texture to these worlds, the former a nascent world of interwoven (if highly exploitative) commerce that asked a reconsideration of place and identity, the latter a granular relational clarification of dominance over a world that has long since become fully known and quantifiable (even offering a retreat to national boundaries).

Within, above, below, and against such hegemonic notions of the world arise a multitude of alternative deployments of the world, some thoroughly historicized, some less so. So there are those responding to imperialism and colonialism, who tell us how “*the modern/colonial world*” arises out of “*the founding colonial wound*” (Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* 53); those who describe the ways in which “the modern age” also has entailed the presence of a “modern world picture,” thus depositing a new totalization of experience (Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture” 128); those who characterize postmodernity by the ways in which it “obliterates the boundaries between self and world” via the “spectacle” (Debord 118); and those who have situated the contemporary world through an encounter with something that we at once participate in constructing, and find ourselves within as “a biosphere, including a built world, that we personally have never made” (Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence* 72). The world ends and continues.

These examples briefly sketch a certain movement of the world through the last century or so. Innumerable others are available, from Immanuel Wallerstein’s “world-systems analysis”

² Cf. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* 132.

³ *U.S. News & World Report* gleefully announced in 2020 that the United States was again the #1 most powerful country in the world, though not, sadly, the “best” country, whatever those descriptors might mean within such a narrow view of “the world” (“Overall Best Countries”).

to the “storyworlds” approach that has recently been developed in narratology (Marie-Laure Ryan). None of these examples use *world* in the same way, and I do not wish to flatten them. The world is all at once something imposed and felt through violence (Mignolo), something organized and produced as a new general experience (Heidegger), something that has disquietingly insinuated itself into our lives in a confusion of the total and the self (Debord), something that describes an overlapping political experience and the possibility of our agency therein (Butler). The world is always in play as a kind of whole, but not one that can ever be fully, objectively known. The world becomes differently known to different people in different times and places. Each attempt to access and depict the world—even where that access is a withdrawal—is powerfully meaningful in coming to understand a world that is always *the world*, for someone, and never *the world*, tout court.

This is not relativism, but an encouragement toward heterogeneous analysis. Again, taking seriously: each and every case of the world warrants context and critical examination. This is a matter of life, and of language—the language in which the world is spoken, the textual context of the utterance—and accounting for the world also means accounting for text and context and tongue (Ngũgĩ 107-8). As something undecided, the world is characterized by ambivalence, a key theme of much of my analysis. The world, as the site of life, is and will remain “ambiguous,” in Simone de Beauvoir’s sense of the term: “to say that [existence] is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won” (129). Each meaning of the world must be uncovered, fought for, in the endless contextualizing and rethinking of life. Throughout this project I will treat all of my concepts and texts in this ambivalent manner, eschewing any definitive or canonical understanding of each by constantly reading each work and concept as an opportunity to turn it against itself, to further seek the

texture of its ambiguity. Ambivalence is key to this dissertation as a political project, and to reading the world as a means of remaking the world: in order to avoid dead-ending, the world must avoid utopia and pure benevolence just as it must avoid nihilism and despair—it must always retain the possibility of happy as well as sinister outcomes, however distasteful this may seem. And so while this dissertation is a practice in perceiving and resisting various forms of dominance, it does not posit finished alternatives, but rather opens possibilities of difference that must be constantly renegotiated. Rather than seek a consensus of alternatives to modern structures of power that might be agreed upon (and, perhaps, set into law), I emphasize a kind of “dissensus,” the insistent denial of definitive meaning, in a constant engagement with shifting localized context which cannot ethically be brought to an end (Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator* 48-9).

It is not by coincidence that my examples so far focus largely on worlds that are modern, postmodern, and contemporary. If the world is to be productively analyzed as a meaningful and ineradicable aspect of life and its experience, this can only be undertaken in a way that reshapes the ongoing processes by which worlds come to oppress and to liberate, to situate life and art. Historically speaking, it thereby becomes necessary to think: what is the “modern” world that seemingly persists, though fragmented and confused, through postmodernity and into the present? How might the relationship between modernity and world be thought? There is certainly a modern world—or modern worlds—and thinking with Mignolo, as one example, means acknowledging and interrogating this. Horkheimer and Adorno, on the other hand, wrote of how the modern “culture industry” posited “the omnipresent and impenetrable world of appearances...as the ideal,” stultifying social relationships and the liberatory power of art (118). Edward Said mentions that the states of the modern west constructed and practiced knowledge as

a bifurcation of the globe into differently privileged worlds (*Culture and Imperialism* 50-2). Not dissimilarly, Jean Baudrillard argued that “modernity imposes itself throughout the world as a homogeneous unity, irradiating from the Occident” (“Modernity” 63), but in a homogeneity of dissonance couched in incessant attack and crisis (64). Baudrillard’s “throughout the world” appears to be nothing more than a casual synonym for the global, but under my reading it is not; regardless of his intention, the world in its invocation here becomes the specific ground for the experience of modernity, a site for the crises of modernity that Baudrillard describes, joining the conversation of modernity in a way that the *globe* would not. This world emanates from a western perspective of the world, making the world a world.

The mention of Baudrillard here is significant to the dissertation in an introductory way, as the work that follows makes frequent use of postmodern and poststructuralist thought, particularly more recent developments in deconstruction and biopolitics. As to biopolitics, I discuss this further later in this introduction. Regarding the prevalence of deconstructionist thought in this project, particularly Jacques Derrida’s late work of the 1990s up to his death in 2004, the affinity should already be apparent: taking the world seriously as a plural, undecidable notion that meaningfully and differently situates life where it appears, means deconstructing the world, in the full rigor of Derrida’s terminology. It means treating the world as something ambivalent, something made, real, lived, unreal, lifeless, life-ending, incomplete and incompletable, something waiting to be unmade and remade, completely. The world is *iterable*; like *différance*, I treat the world as “an aconceptual concept,” one having no stable, objective meaning, but instead acting as a site for developing its own context in a way that prevents it from ever settling into a totality (“Afterword” 118). Each iteration of the world bears analysis.

As I restrict myself to study of a particular trajectory of modernity (not precluding that there are certainly others) in the Euro-American world and a few of its postcolonies, my analysis focuses on the art responding to this modernity, which falls in the purviews of modernism and postcolonialism. Despite the theoretical bent of the project (and this introduction), this dissertation is after all primarily a critical work on modernist literature, and the texts analyzed mostly fall rather conventionally within the field of modernism as it's understood at the practical, disciplinary level: experimental narratives penned between 1890-1950 that explore avant-garde forms and styles while situating the reader in unfamiliar and uncomfortable psychological worlds (Childs; Lukács). The enduring political force and radical aesthetics of the movement come increasingly into question the further removed we become from its historical moment (e.g. Williams 130), but it remains possible to envision Anglo-modernism as an aesthetic movement with a particular time, place, and general artistic aim—though the danger remains of homogenizing the works therein if this canonical framing is taken *too* seriously. Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, and W. B. Yeats' *The Tower* all fall fairly comfortably within the long-established field, as does Virginia Woolf's *Flush*, though it is much less frequently studied than any of these other works. Modernism continues to operate as a discipline, shaping knowledge and power in academia, and as such we should take it seriously on its face, while also disciplining it ourselves, as Pamela Caughie has demonstrated, a disciplining that must involve looking for modernism on a global scale in the recognition that modernity itself is a global phenomenon (Doyle and Winkiel).

I build throughout the project on an array of modernist scholarship by synthesizing, responding to, and revising existing readings of my texts, particularly those from biopolitical perspectives. There is a wide array of work of this kind, but much of it speaks to biopolitics only

in passing or only uses limited concepts from biopolitical thought (Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer* is a common example) in endeavoring to point out particular aspects of biopower at work in modernist literature. None of this critical work, to my knowledge, covers the breadth of biopolitical thought that I do here—including especially material that is often left out of biopolitical conversations, such as Derrida's late work—nor does it use biopolitics as a frame for situating the management of life in modernism across race, gender, and the nonhuman. Most of all, this body of preexisting critical work often falls short of drawing ethical imperatives from its diagnoses, as I do in the latter half of this dissertation.

None of which is to say that there is not excellent work being done on biopolitics and modernism, though it is rather scant. Much of the failures I list result from the fact that biopolitics and Euro-American modernism rarely coincide in book-length studies. There are some standout counterexamples, however, particularly Ewa Płonowska Ziarek's *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism*, and Abdul R. JanMohamed's *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death*. JanMohamed's book plays a central role in my third chapter, and some of Ziarek's other work will come up in chapter 2. Both of these extended studies, however, apply biopolitics in a somewhat secondary fashion, and do so mostly via bare life (the shortcomings of which I discuss in the chapters). Shorter approaches have more variety, but often lack breadth and depth. In many cases, however, biopolitical studies of my texts simply do not exist.

In chapter 1 I incorporate work on animal worlds that mentions biopolitics offhandedly in the course of discussing Virginia Woolf's writing (Herman, Mattison), but biopolitical readings of Pound's *Cantos* are essentially nonexistent. The case is similar for D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* in chapter 2, although Russell West-Pavlov has conducted an enlightening study of

biopolitical “exception” in Lawrence’s *Kangaroo. Native Son*, as I discuss in chapter 3, on the other hand, has been productively approached through biopolitics by JanMohamed and others like Jack Taylor, particularly in light of Bigger Thomas’ experience of the law and Wright’s distribution of death—but there is a great deal left unsaid as to what kinds of responsibilities might be gleaned from such perspectives. Oftentimes, modernist criticism works through biopolitical themes without directly deploying biopolitical thought or terminology, as in Sami Schalk’s writing on eugenics and Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (chapter 3). Finally, the work of Yeats examined in chapter 4 has seen some attention via biopolitics, as in Joseph Valente’s compelling analysis of “Easter, 1916” and its “bioaesthetics” of disability. The blend of biopolitical thought on sovereignty, natality, and hospitality that I bring to “The Tower” and “Youth and Age” in this chapter, however, is totally unique.

The works of postcolonial literature that I read alongside these modernist texts offer a necessary, if always incomplete, global context for the fallout of turn-of-the-century modernization, especially as negotiations of life and politics in decolonizing countries. These texts include Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*. Coetzee’s work has received a wide array of biopolitical treatments, and Rhys and Soyinka have often been involved in biopolitical conversations. As such, my biopolitical work on these texts often involves synthesizing preexisting readings and—by placing them alongside modernist works—developing critical understanding of biopolitics as it moves through transnational representations.

Rhys’ novel generates a retrospective, critical look at the impact of nineteenth-century imperialism in the Caribbean, which conveys incisively the colonial gendering of bodies that has remained key to the operations of modern power since the onset of European imperialism.

Soyinka's play, first performed in 1975, constructs a more recent look at a Yoruba culture attempting to negotiate colonial life in 1946 Nigeria, which is around the same time that Rhys was writing *Wide Sargasso Sea* (though the latter wouldn't be published until 1966). Despite their temporal and spatial remove from canonical Anglophone modernism, these two works share many of the qualities by which modernism is generally understood, though both ask that we trouble that modernism in reading them alongside it, rather than simply annexing them within it. Rhys' writing, for instance, is formally consonant with the experimental forms of Euro-American modernists, though her work "goes beyond...more formal similarities to modernism to expose the violence that *informs* them" (Emery 418).

Soyinka's play is likewise trained upon a local past, reframing the relevance of Yoruba cosmology and its colonial context in a manner reminiscent of the Euro-American modernist move to "make new" the myths from their own geographical and cultural forebears. Which is to say that *Death and the King's Horseman* can be called modernist in the ways it experiments with and rewrites tradition, but cannot be wholly described by modernism. Like Rhys, Soyinka asks that we question violences historical and present. Violence, imperialism, the other, and the political tools for grappling with each are central to Coetzee's allegorical novel as well. *Waiting for the Barbarians* has been called a work of postmodernism (Olsen)—though this perspective has been contested (Eckstein 176)—and it has also been described as modernist in its form (Wade). Leaving this debate to others, the novel fits quite comfortably in the dissertation as a more recent engagement of imperialism's racial mechanisms on a global scale, and Coetzee's visceral, allegorical approach keeps it from jarring with the more classically modernist texts that it is read alongside.

My general disciplinary philosophy of modernism is to allot it a diversity and undecidedness, whereby modernism might crop up—always differently and never fully determining of context—wherever and whenever we perceive responses to modernity (Friedman; Berman). In this project, however, I read work that mostly demonstrates the formal, mythical, and historical revisionist tendencies of modernism as they've long been understood, while also emphasizing that such reading must account for diverse perspectives and work to uncover missing voices within and alongside itself.

The first two chapters assert my attempt in this project to not only read the world, where it appears, but to activate this reading by emphasizing its capacity to change the ways we think the world. This is what I call—borrowing from many others but most prominently Donna Haraway and Gayatri Spivak—*worlding*. Worlding is the practice of examining the world, a world, perceiving its boundaries, its limitations, its possibilities, its context, and then asking what would need to happen to change how that world is composed. This means working with the world as it appears textually and historically, and in my approach textual consideration possesses the power to change how we really live the world.

Worlding happens constantly in a passive way, but it can also be imposed from outside or activated from within one's world. My emphasis throughout will be on the play between these two forms of worlding: the ways in which oppressive limits are willfully imposed, and how relationships and understandings might be fostered that are capable of shifting the limits for life. When an imperialist invasion takes place by the British in India, for instance, and a new set of written and unwritten rules are put into place, this is a worlding, as Spivak describes (“The Rani of Sirmur” 253): an existing world is taken hold of, attacked, exploited, and reshaped in the mold

of another world. And in the decolonizing struggle that follows, in the rejection of the boundaries put into place by the forces of colonialism, and in the new possibilities and new freedoms and new restrictions that are put into place—in this too is a worlding. The awkward gerund form makes this active aspect of the world⁴ unavoidable. Though no world is ever fully static, and our experiences can never be tallied up into a complete and unchangeable account of our lived situation, *worlding* is what happens when a world changes radically, when it is made to become another world.

In chapter 1 I read Pound and Woolf together through a posthumanist, animal studies lens, against the backdrop of twentieth-century fascist racism. Here I argue that the grounds of species by which life is organized into the politically relevant (human) and the irrelevant (nonhuman) are not simply anthropocentric categorizations instituted to allow for the ongoing dominance of the former over the latter—at least, they are not *only* that. Species difference is always-already undercut by the cuts it attempts to make between bodies. Where Pound's *Pisan Cantos* frequently expresses a fascination with the animal world around the poet narrator, while also operating upon a political logic that separates and hierarchizes human/nonhuman, the poem reveals that its species exclusions make its human and poetic subjects what they are. In this way, the fascination with and expulsion of the nonhuman always means that the nonhuman returns to constitute the human, in an abject logic that will be familiar from the work of Julia Kristeva. Woolf's *Flush* enacts this undecidability between human/nonhuman from an obverse perspective by centering the experiences of the eponymous canine. Woolf demonstrates not only the entanglement of human/nonhuman—and the worlding of our anthropocentric selves that must

⁴ Again, I will here and throughout often use the phrase “the world” as a kind of shorthand for “a particular world,” or some similar construction. But “the world” is never The World, the world containing all others—there is no such thing.

thereby take place—but also the historical political practices that have been predicated upon denying this entanglement, especially the fascism that Pound found so attractive. I therefore read here Pound’s avowal of fascism against the submerged politics of his poem, and alongside Woolf’s disavowal of fascist racism, which she develops through the notion of animal race. The theme of dehumanization will be woven throughout the dissertation, as any politics that takes as its foundation a strict notion of what constitutes the human can only end up perpetuating racism, sexism, xenophobia, and injustice by dehumanizing its others (Fanon 110).

Chapter 2 develops a reading of Rhys and Lawrence that takes on another form of political exclusion: the gendered exception of what is understood as feminine from the category of “Man.” This category has long been deployed to signal a particular body—white, masculine, heterosexual—possessing a natural inevitability and inheriting a dominance proper to it: “‘Man’ is a purely ontogenetic/purely biological conception of being, who then creates ‘culture’” (Wynter 2). As in each chapter, I approach this strategy of dominance as a form of *sovereignty*, whereby Men attempt to assert a right to political control by inscribing a biological reason for their dominant position. I take a psychoanalytic and feminist tactic in this chapter, coming at this exclusion from the political of what is deemed feminine as a way by which those gendered as men might reassure themselves of their bodily certainty and importance. This pretense to gendered wholeness, of course, cannot hold, and as I read *The Rainbow* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, I describe a response to sexualized dominance whereby exceeding the limits of properly gendered political spheres might result in the arrival of a new wonder at, and potential for, the world. Embracing the possibility of this as a project of feminist justice means thinking also how dehumanization, gendering, racialization, and colonization have intersected to create global webs of masculinist power.

Developing an analysis of the racialized component of this power is the key concern of chapter 3. Here I work through Larsen, Wright, and Coetzee in order to further uncover how racialization and racism have constituted an embodied politics of rigid exclusion that, in its exacting divisions of bodies, never succeeds in discovering clear distinctions with any biological basis. Instead, racism in modernity continues to practice a politics of globalized apartheid that mutates and perpetuates the historical dominances of imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and Jim Crow—biopolitical and proto-biopolitical apparatuses of regulating populations that are at base contingent upon sequences of militarized conquest. Racializing and ethnicizing enact a political order that makes way for—in fact necessitates—practices of violence against populations that do not fulfill standards of whiteness. Through this exclusion, individuals in ethnic groups are made to stand in for the group and any stereotypical traits the group has been assigned. In the hegemony of ethnicity, “the human body becomes a defenseless target for rape and veneration, and the body, in its material and abstract phase, a resource for metaphor” (Spillers 66). Though I am a white man, in these chapters I attempt to formulate a political critique and response to racism and sexism that does more than recognize their ongoing presence and my own embodied alignment with the populations that white supremacy benefits. Literary criticism can have little political consequence unless it moves to take account of the multifarious ways in which life has been and continues to be dominated—and does not stop at taking account. I continue in this chapter to explore the ethical force that literature holds for the formulation of a theoretical community acting to remake a racist and sexist world.

The final chapter takes a slightly different tack. Where in each of the preceding chapters I take apart and respond to a specific mode of political exception, chapter 4 looks to Yeats, Soyinka, and Derrida in a search for enduring deconstructions of sovereignty and for an ethics

that responds to biopower. Each chapter to this point has involved rethinking an aspect of biopolitical thought—posthuman biopolitics, the biopolitics of race and gender—regions of biopolitical theory that have persistent blind spots. Chapter 4 involves rethinking a more explicit biopolitical concept: natality, or birth. Here I work through a biopolitics of natality by reconfiguring it as a way in which we might continue to think the real bodies—coming to life, being denied life—that make up the world, and the birth of the world itself. Yeats' *The Tower* offers unique and under-examined capacities for thinking rebirth of the world and the destabilization of power upon affective grounds that are heavily metaphorical, yet not removed from the political context of Irish nationalism. *Death and the King's Horseman*, on the other hand, culminates with a view toward birth to come that is quite literal, but that also must involve rethinking how the world of colonial and postcolonial Nigeria came into being and can continue to come into being. This chapter is a world of towers, precipices, bodies secluded and discarded and coming together, bodies we know and love, and life that becomes strange before our eyes, life that arrives and that might arrive. How do we practice a politics that remakes the world as a hospitable place for bodies, both the real bodies that are already here and living this world, and any others that might turn up? This concluding chapter confronts this question, answering it in a way that makes way for the continued questioning of the world, the political, and life.

In moving through these chapters I develop a constellation of themes that I find necessary for conceptualizing the world, not only as something exterior, but as something lived, something experienced in the body—something that, beyond a sense of place, informs us of our status as political beings, our positionality in relation to power, and our ethical responsibilities. My primary theoretical framework is therefore one of *biopolitics*, which offers a historicized apparatus for thinking life as a legal formation in the world. As I discuss in the chapters,

however, biopolitics often suffers from lacunae when it comes to specifying and contextualizing bodily experiences before the law, particularly in terms of racism, sexism, and xenophobia. In an endeavor to move the highly productive but incomplete contributions of biopolitics beyond overly general theorizing, I center throughout this project the particular *body* as it experiences its world. The body's experience of the modern world, in which it cannot escape its differential position as political life, is an uneven experience of privilege and oppression, domination and discarding. I use the concept of *sovereignty* to explicate this experience and its politics, drawing upon various biopolitical deployments of the term but rewriting them, pairing them, specifying them. Finally, in the two concluding chapters I put my readings to work toward an ethical intervention in modernist studies. Here I assert that, if we come to know the world as something plural and political, something made by ourselves and others that we might remake with others, then this can only take place through a radical welcoming of the other. This welcoming I describe as *hospitality*, following Derrida but reframing his thinking on the topic by insisting upon the bodily specificity of the other, while also contending that his work is essential to biopolitics in a connection that has so far been undertheorized, a "biopolitical Derrida" that remains barely perceptible in the current theoretical landscape.

I. Biopolitics

Because my analysis in this dissertation is concerned with the ways in which *life* is both privileged and degraded as a form of *politics*, along the lines of populations and their supposed biologies, I approach my texts from a biopolitical frame. *Biopolitics* describes an organizing force in modernity of both dominance and resistance, one "articulated by a discourse that links political decision making to the construction of bodies in struggle" (Hardt and Negri,

Commonwealth 61). Although “biopolitics” has also come to name a field of critical theory with many varying approaches and internal critiques, its initial formulation by Michel Foucault remains canonical. In his “*Society Must Be Defended*” lecture of March 17, 1976, Foucault contended that at the end of the eighteenth century there emerged “a ‘biopolitics’ of the human race,” a “seizure of power” that is “massifying,” that is directed at “man-as-species” (243). Foucault conceives here of biopolitics as a “technology of power” that manages the life of the species of “man” through the application of a “biopower” that attends to birth rates, public hygiene, disability, etc. (243-5). Crucially, biopower “consists in making live and letting die” (247), unlike the power of the old sovereign monarch, who was able only to either “take life or let live” (241). As western states shifted away from royalist models and into the more contemporary statist forms we’ve come to know, they began to exercise a biopower and practice a biopolitics through which they fostered the life of their populations by neglecting those who they saw to be detrimental to the health of the state and its people, and prolonging and encouraging the life of those believed to be beneficial.

In the chapters that follow I take up this Foucauldian framework while modifying and critiquing it in some major ways as I engage with a wide array of its interlocutors. Foucault, for instance, suggested that because of its macro-level concern with populations, biopower was not directed at individual bodies. He also focused on western populations, dividing these along racial lines that speak to political binaries, rather than to the ethnicized forms of racism that have become structural in western states. I parse out my responses to these notions in the sections below and the chapters that follow; suffice to say here, the exercise of biopower falls on subdivided populations within a particular “body politic,” and individuals within groups that are not valued by the state bear the brunt of biopower in visceral effects upon their bodies. The

groups these members belong to, of course, are not random. The violence and negligence of the state upon them signals the impacts of structural racism, sexism, ableism, classism, xenophobia. These impacts contain, not the falling away of sovereign power, but its transmutation into something more insidious. By approaching biopolitics on both its macro and micro levels, I demonstrate how the history of biopower is also the history of structural racism and other major forms of politicized bigotry.

Along with Foucault, Giorgio Agamben's essential intervention in biopolitical thought is key to this dissertation, and much of my own intervention consists in rewriting the terms set by these theorists in a pluralizing move. So while "bare life" and Foucauldian biopower are important to my thinking, I do not take these terms for granted but open them up to a new diversity and specificity. In this way, I follow the work of Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe on the posthumanist intersections of biopolitics and species, Jemima Repo and Kyla Schuller on how biopolitics helps to rewrite the history of gender and sexuality, Alexander Weheliye and Abdul R. JanMohamed on remaking biopolitics as a tool for critical race analysis, and Achille Mbembe and Scott Morgensen on what a biopolitics that takes account of its colonial underpinnings might look like.

These are rich grounds for further analysis in a biopolitical register, all of which require constantly throwing biopolitics itself, and its applications, into question. There is a great deal more work to be done; this dissertation only scratches the surface, for instance, of the ways in which "the discourse of biopolitics misses a whole dimension of both postcolonial resistance as well as its aftermaths" (Varadharajan and Wyman-McCarthy 119). It also only begins—although more fully—to assert the relevance and utility of biopolitics for modernist scholarship. While there are numerous biopolitical readings of modernist works, there is no central account of the

biopolitics of modernism,⁵ a genealogy of biopower's primary mechanisms of managing the bodies of the modernist period and its art. Such an account would prove highly useful in tracing the political assemblages of race, gender, sexuality, species, ability, and class as they are represented and experienced in modernity. This dissertation begins this project, which I hope to continue as I develop what comes below into a book.

Throughout, I think through and alongside recent developments in and counters to biopolitical thought, from Mbembe's "necropolitics," to Byung-Chul Han's "psychopolitics," to ways in which we might think "beyond biopolitics" and in doing so keep pace with "today's reformulation of governance" and its "extension of biopolitics beyond itself" (Clough and Willse 3). It is worth keeping in mind throughout not only counters to and developments of biopower in its specifically Foucauldian (McNay) and Agambenian (Weheliye) forms, but also approaches that radically rethink what biopolitics can and should be and do, approaches like that of Jairus Grove, who has recently argued that *geopolitics* might be a more apt framing in the contemporary global era (cf. Mignolo). My project is a companion to such elaborations—not contending that biopolitics names an umbrella under which any political theorizing must take place, but rather attempting to open what we have come to know as the biopolitical as a space for new, diverse thinking on life, bodies, and the world.

II. Sovereignty

While a broad constellation of biopolitical concepts are essential to the dissertation, perhaps the most essential is that of *sovereignty*. My application of the term is a development and amalgamation of a broad series of uses, and it is one of my central arguments that

⁵ Theresa Runstedtler is one of very few to even use this phrase (63).

sovereignty persists in modernity and in the contemporary age, not in a unified, identifiable personage, but as a diffuse assemblage. The key figure in my thinking on such sovereignty is Agamben—though his use falls short of mine—for the way in which he countered Foucault’s discussion of sovereignty via Carl Schmitt’s inescapable equation of sovereignty and the decision to make a legal exception (Schmitt 5). In the “*Society Must Be Defended*” lectures, Foucault asserts that we must move on from analyses of sovereignty if we are to understand biopolitics, because biopolitics concerns power and analysis of power must involve uncovering relations, institutional formations, and structures of knowledge, not examining any singular source or formal relationship under the misapprehension that power emanates from it directly (45). Certainly, we cannot expect to make much progress by seeking the presence in modern government of any unilateral “sovereign natural right” (Spinoza 175).

What Foucault misses, however, though Agamben does not, is that the entry into modernity cannot entail a disappearance of sovereignty, even as it does bring about a shift in structures of power. Instead, the arrival of biopolitics signals a *new* form of sovereignty, one that—in a way that ironically enough parallels Foucauldian power—is plural, uneven, and always in need of being unearthed through critical archaeology (*Homo Sacer* 6). While Agamben fails to take full advantage of his insight because of overarching reductive and Eurocentric tendencies in his thought, his intervention convincingly asserts the need to retain sovereignty as a conceptual tool. Foucauldian power remains useful, but different. Where we speak of a politics that puts life in question (as Foucault puts it), it remains the case that certain forms of that life retain just that capacity to decide upon the law, and who is excepted from its protections, that Schmitt called sovereignty. Power has a great deal to tell us about the ubiquitous ways that life is managed by the state, particularly through its various institutions. But to conceptualize the ways

in which bodies are included within or excepted from the life-giving and life-ignoring capacities of politics requires the framework of sovereignty. To put the distinction between Agambenian sovereignty and Foucauldian power in the simplest terms: sovereignty allows us to speak of exception. There is no exception from power. As Agamben puts it, radically undercutting Foucault's analysis while injecting it with some much-needed political texture, "biopolitics is at least as old as the sovereign exception" (*Homo Sacer* 6).

Agamben's key insight, at least for this dissertation, is that where sovereignty emerges, it does so in bodies. Bodies are constantly being organized, hierarchized, oppressed, discarded, elevated, privileged, killed, forced to live, maimed, dominated, and liberated in modernity—in ways that are always shifting. Of course, people have undergone these same torments and triumphs before our modernity, and here Foucault and Agamben converge to set radical and historicized terms for political analysis. Again, Foucault contrasts the "making live and letting die" of biopower with the kingly sovereignty, which "took life and let live" (247). States (western states in particular) now treat their peoples not in a feudal sense of direct domination or total unconcern speckled with intermittent murder, but as a living population that must be controlled and regulated for the betterment of a collective polis. If we accept this historical shift, but deny sovereignty's disappearance, what then? We can only find that sovereignty continues to exist in many bodies, rather than a singular body, characterizing formal and lasting relations between them, and the exclusions and inclusions enacted upon people. There is yet sovereignty in our democracies, just as there is yet power. But the two are not the same, and the former articulates a personalized exposure to exceptional violence missing from the latter.

Many have made the point that, while Agamben's intervention into Foucault's biopolitics is essential, its ongoing usefulness is curtailed by Agamben's over-emphasis on his ideas of bare

life and the camp (Weheliye; Morgensen; Žižek, *Welcome*). For Agamben, the camp—the concentration camp, especially those of Nazi Germany—is the site par excellence for the production of bare life, of life that “*may be killed and yet not sacrificed*” (8). The camp comes for him to describes the condition of life in modernity, writ large. While this is a simplification of Agamben, the insufficiency and potential for Eurocentrism of the formulation are immediately apparent. By over-inscribing the sites of exception by which sovereign power makes itself known, Agamben truncates the very heterogeneity of sovereign mechanisms that his theory brings into view. It is one of the most essential aims of this dissertation to recover that heterogeneity by denying that there can be any single embodied site of sovereignty and its exclusion that overrides all others. So while antisemitism and the holocaust are incontrovertibly essential to the development of biopower in modernity, their analysis cannot be made to stand in the place of analysis of sexism, slavery, speciesism, colonialism, and anthropocentrism.

While these are many of the grounds upon which I expand the modern applicability of biopolitical thought on sovereignty, they are not the only grounds. Racism in the United States operates upon an assumption that sovereignty is to be found only in white bodies, and sexism emanates from a masculinized body that possesses none of the impregnability and natural capacity for dominance that it is imagined to contain. But ableism also works from a norm that privileges an imaginary bodily wholeness, and classism organizes laboring bodies through a dense assemblage of economic and political sovereignties. Each of these cases, again, turns on a rigid *exception* of certain forms of life from the law that the framework of power does not aptly recognize.⁶ I do not examine the latter two exceptions in this project, nor innumerable other

⁶ Which is obviously not to say that power is irrelevant to oppression. The task is to take up biopower, diffuse and constant as it is in modernity, and identify where and concerning whom it rigidifies into structures of sovereignty, further indicating these as places for intercession.

bases of sovereignty. They remain, as with the modes of sovereignty I do analyze here, ever open to a biopolitical analysis that can never be a box-checking—we can never move on from examination of any of the ways in which life is politicized. We can only continue to think them and think them better.⁷

There are a wide range of other concepts of sovereignty that might complement or push up against that which I describe here. We might think, notably, of indigenous formulations of sovereignty, which are likewise highly concerned with bodies and what is done to them when they are denied ownership and agency in the practice of another sovereignty: genocide, rape, displacement, dispossession. In response, we should bear in mind the potential of a sovereignty of “interrelatedness and responsibility” (Smith, “American Studies” 312), one where “control over land and resources” becomes key (Smith, “Native American Feminism” 128). Such an approach has more in common with deconstructions of state power than might at first seem likely, while also leveraging a historical and geographical context that biopolitical thought has repeatedly missed.

These notions of sovereignty are very different in their genesis and aims, but like the Agambenian concept all turn upon a unique model of hierarchy, where one form of life has exercised and continues to exercise a collective power to exclude another form of life from political presence, and from setting the stakes of their own world. Sovereignty makes the world—those forms of life that receive full legal presence on biological grounds (generally in the west: straight white males) live in a political world that is very different from lives that “fall

⁷ Regarding classism, economics, and the personization of the corporation in the United States, it would for example be worthwhile to consider Chantal Mouffe’s assertion that corporations now “appear as the real locus of sovereignty” (120). Or we might turn to a rethinking of sovereignty in our online contemporaneity as a description of one who can “produce *absolute quiet*” in the midst of digital chaos (Han, *In the Swarm* 5). Or we might think notions of food sovereignty, or theological sovereignty, or monetary sovereignty, or land sovereignty, etc., etc.

short” of these grounds. Thinking such excluded experiences through sovereignty, rather than (or in addition to) power, allows one to say of particular bodies: these are excepted from political life, these are disposable on such and such biological grounds. And on the other hand: these are the beneficiaries of these grounds. This is nowhere so obvious than in the Nazi camps (which helps explain Agamben’s privileging of the example) where one form of life decided that another form should be disposed of, and then did so, legally and in the name of the health of the people and the state. In such a decision, worlds are made and changed, and so worlding will come to play a key role in how I describe the experiences within and without sovereignty that contextualize the infinite variety of sovereign relationships.

III. Bodies

Sovereignty inheres in bodies. Even in being denied to bodies, sovereignty inscribes its denial upon those bodies. Although sovereignty is insistently practiced by nations on the basis of place and notions of nativity (Sharma), this sovereignty is always felt by and carried out in the experiences of bodies. The advent of the practice of biopolitics brings with it a newly political body, a body that is part of a population, a genre of life, that is part of a race, a gender, a human or nonhuman species, that can produce other bodies or destroy them, or regulate them, or organize them. I refer to this as the *modern body*: the newly shaped and shapeable body that emerges within regimes of biopower that emerge in our modernity (cf. Cohen, for example). This body is the site of our immanent, affective experience of sovereignty or of sovereign exclusion—the body is the extension of what and that we feel to be our self, and it is where our self feels. This is not new; this body was quite familiar to Spinoza, in another modernity (71). Building from this idea, we come to see that the modern body, like the body envisioned by Spinoza, is

never purely nor simply a *human* body, though it is very often a body that gets called human (Deleuze 127). In fact, while the politicization of bodies is almost always very certain of what it refers to, there is nothing at all known about the body a priori beyond the fact of its extension, and so its political certainty must make us suspicious. The body, as Deleuze says in thinking through Spinoza, is always in need of mapping (128). Even in speaking of a body that we commonly agree to call human, there are always several bodies available—and more than that (Barthes 16).

Mapping these bodies means calling them what they are called, politically and populationally: male, female, Black, white, human, animal—while never taking these categories at face value. Bodies are oppressed for the categories they find themselves in, and these too must be taken seriously, if only to underscore their vacuity. Africans were enslaved on grounds of Blackness, women were and are assigned domestic roles on grounds of physical sex, animals are consigned to be ate or hunted on the basis of their foot-shape, hair, speech capabilities—the bare beginning of an incompletable list that asks where a body came from, what language it speaks, who it knows, what it smells like, what it believes, what it wears, what it eats, etc., etc. A list, again, it must be said, that never asserts equivalence. Our bodies are enlisted in political categories, and they are the place that we feel those categories, within and without a body politic that is itself embodied (Esposito, *Persons and Things* 141)—“places of existence,” feeling us out (Nancy, *Corpus* 15).

No one body, uniform. “There is not ‘the’ body,” and, lest we imagine that the mapping and making of bodies might be a task distinct from our worlding, “There is that there is: creation of the world, *technē* of bodies” (Nancy, *Corpus* 119). We experience the modern world in and as bodies, we experience others as bodies in the world, we come to know the political as the bodies

we are. This framing raises concerns about the body in particular as site of affect, phenomenology, and epistemology—the body is where and how we feel the limits and structures of our world, it is the extension of our selves in which we experience the world, and it is the exploratory apparatus by which we learn the world. Sovereignty, too, is present or conspicuously absent in each of these registers: the pain and limits inflicted upon non-sovereign bodies, as well as the wonder and joy embodied in coopting the power to change one’s world; the structures of life and relations and cities and geographies and events that we are subjected to or shielded from, arising always from political frameworks that call us bodies of one kind or another. Bodies, life, politics, sovereignty—disentangleable and undecidable, but never indeterminate, always asking analysis and decision, never concluding (Derrida, “Afterword” 149). And always being circled by biopolitics, grappling with biopower, acting and experiencing and learning and feeling the stakes of each body, living a politics.

IV. Hospitality

Up to this point, what I’ve described is largely diagnostic. It involves discovering formations of sovereignty, ways that politics takes control of life, what it calls that life, and how law, governance, freedom, and the state take the shape of an epidemiology of political bodies. The most urgent contribution of this dissertation, however, is the way in which it turns from the diagnostic to the ethical. Modern literature, read biopolitically, does not just inform us about the various ways that sovereignty practices itself upon bodies. This alone is a step, but not a radical advancement, from the numerous familiar analyses of racism or sexism in X work and what it tells us about the modern condition. If the body is where we are oppressed or privileged, if sovereignty names the attribute and agency of this organization, if biopolitics describes the

landscape of bodies living this sovereignty, if bodies and sovereignty and biopolitics form an entanglement that we live as the world...then simply drawing lines from body to biopolitics to world can never go far enough. The body must be the “point of resistance” to biopower, but it must resist more than a division of bodies into persons or things (Esposito, *Persons and Things* 144), and it must more than resist. We cannot continue the fight against what has become ubiquitous and hegemonic in the oppositional mode deployed against more direct forces of domination (Baudrillard, *Agony of Power* 117).

In each chapter, I propose an ethics that responds to the political form of the world by which we might introduce a logic beyond that of dominance—each a different but intersecting form of *il*logic, as it were: posthuman sovereignty (chapter 1), indifference (chapter 2), barbaric hospitality (chapter 3), hospitality of natality and estrangement (chapter 4). In my biopolitical approach to posthumanism and sovereignty, I define the ways that bodies are categorized according to the logic of species, and explode these categories in a turn to the possibilities of making new worlds with nonhuman others. In indifference, we draw again the all-too-familiar lines of gendered discrimination—and then set aside the pretense of these to any natural necessity. As the final two chapters make clear, each of these is a form of hospitality, of welcoming a difference that cannot be known ahead of time.⁸ In chapter 3, we confront the racialized other and the barbarian, and open our gates and our homes, rather than closing them. Likewise in chapter 4 we welcome the coming of an other as a birth, as the entry of the stranger into the world, and of the other already at hand from whom we become estranged. These hospitalities involve real bodies, real people in place and time—African Americans suffering

⁸ Each of these responses is truly an aspect of each other; indifference makes way for new posthuman worldings, the posthuman can only arise when we become indifferent to the givenness of species, hospitality comes about only as the potential of remaking a world whose rules of exclusion we have become indifferent to, etc. There is an orbital logic to these ethics that is never given in advance.

under racism, Black South Africans ejected by apartheid, Irish nationals dreaming of a renewed home, native Nigerians enacting a Yoruba cosmology against the violence of British imperialism. But this hospitality also involves welcoming a radical otherness whose time and place are unknown. Neither the actual nor the radical is to be privileged over the other—these two are undecidable in their own difference and sameness, as we come to recognize that any real other retains always a kernel of the stranger, and that we ourselves remain always at a dis-identity to the *us* we project. This is an ethics, therefore, of estranging ourselves from ourselves and from others, by way of which we become closer, more intimate, more connected with each.

In deploying hospitality in this way, I contend that an active radical politics is an essential component of literary study; literature does not just make present the symptoms of power, it is the grounds for exceeding that power. Literature shows us our others, and the others that we are, and in doing so it shows us where and how to look for a new politics, one that is practicable in theory and criticism and in the face of life and the everyday. My use of hospitality owes a great debt to Derrida's, but where Derrida often accounts for hospitality in rather esoteric terms, I attempt to guide the approach toward bodily specificity. While criticisms that Derrida's theory ignores real bodies in favor of meditations on Otherness (e.g. McNay 128) are somewhat overstated, a theory and practice of hospitality is ever and always in need of contextualization in life, just as its philosophical apparatus never achieves doneness.

The formulation of hospitality runs as follows⁹: the statist and political ethics with which we are familiar operate upon a form of hospitality that is essentially limited; they welcome others

⁹ In Derrida's thought, hospitality emerges prominently in the 1990s, becoming particularly crucial in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* and *Of Hospitality* with Anne Dufourmantelle (both published in French in 1997). To my mind, *Of Hospitality* is the more direct, specific, and productive meditation on the subject; though *Adieu* seems to be more frequently brought to bear on conversations involving hospitality, it often becomes mired in tangents emanating from Levinas' thought that are in no way satisfactorily pursued by Derrida, particularly concerning gender. Hospitality continues to evolve in Derrida's late thought, cropping up briefly in "Rams" (2003) and taking the form

conditionally—from a certain place, having certain skills, having fulfilled certain criteria. But a hospitality that would be absolute, unlimited, that would move us beyond criteria such as these—criteria that is often racist or xenophobic—could have no such limitations (*Of Hospitality* 77). Then again, as an unlimited openness, it would present infinite difficulties and could never pretend to make way for a utopic community. As is key to every aspect of my project, hospitality must be viewed with ambivalence—it makes way both for friendship and home-making with the other, and for violence and intrusion. “[P]ossible hospitality to the worst is necessary so that good hospitality can have a chance” (*Adieu* 35). The hope is not that at some hypothetical endpoint we can weigh the outcomes and assert that unlimited hospitality proved to be beneficial more often than destructive; rather, unlimited hospitality offers a framework for meeting with others and making space for each on ever-unique grounds. Practicing such a heterogeneous ethics, to return to Beauvoir, means always retaining ambiguity before the fact. There must always remain an element of “agonism” to this politics, as Chantal Mouffe might say, a productive questioning and tension that never fully resolve (13).

The theory and stakes of my development of hospitality are fleshed out more fully in chapters 3 and 4, but the concept’s absence between here and there does not mean that its reintroduction marks a departure from worlding and indifference. As my title and the opening to this introduction indicate, the task at hand is to think the world and how to remake it, a task that requires always the welcoming of difference, whether that difference is animal or gendered or housed within the self. For similar reasons the dissertation does not end finally with hospitality, but with a peculiar twist on it: that of estranging. For a hospitality that is occupied less with itself as a philosophical concept and more with what it can do as an action alongside particular bodies,

of “hostipitality” in 1997. This is by no means an exhaustive account; for one overview of Derridean hospitality and some of its primary interlocutors, see Still.

it is necessary that we think the strangers that hospitality welcomes, and that we continue to estrange ourselves from calcified senses of self and other. We must grapple with the strange and difference as such, but just as much we must meet with the foreigner, the refugee, the neighbor, the migrant—the stranger from far away and nearby—with the “universality of ‘strangers,’” both as a universality and a specificity (Žižek, *Refugees* 87). It is my hope, in approaching this aim, that this project asks both that literary studies rethink how it interprets the world *and* how it can change it. In worlding modernism, therefore, we might also estrange ourselves from the discipline and return to it anew, with ethical purpose and philosophical rigor.

Chapter 1

Fascist Racism and Modernist Animals: Toward a Posthuman Sovereignty

In this opening chapter, I examine the organization and disorganization of the modern body in its peculiar modernist iteration, working through a human/nonhuman divide in Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf. The modern body is the container from within which we negotiate the modern forces of biopower. As a body, it is the mark of that legislated self that is essential to all individual existence. It signals intersecting experiences of dominance and the ceaselessly litigated bounds of gender, race, and degrees of the human—while also resisting these pressures. Yet it is also the case that the modern body is nowhere to be found. As a universal category, the modern body has no members; there exists no wholly isolatable individual who might be held up as a representative example. This body, and the experience of being classed as such, is a legacy of an Enlightenment project of “progress” that has never disappeared, of the nagging presence of Cartesian thought, and of a salvific European rhetoric (Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* 11). Modernity has always had its aberrant bodies, in need (supposedly) of improvement (and exploitation). With my understanding of the modern body, I attempt to account for conditions of modernity, coloniality, and biopower that intersect in the modernist period and continue crisscrossing into the present day—instituting as they do so various sovereignties, laws, and assemblages of life—and for how these are depicted, questioned, and reinforced in literature.

I. Politics, Modernism, and Animals

There is an underdiscussed relationship between the division of bodies into human/nonhuman categories, the bodily hierarchies of mid-twentieth-century European fascism, and the ways in which the former can be read against the latter. In this chapter I examine this tangle through readings of Pound's *Cantos*—especially his *Pisan Cantos*—and Woolf's *Flush*. Pound's poem and Woolf's novel are intensely preoccupied with nonhuman animals, whose insistent presence arises as a challenge to the purity of the human category. This preoccupation has serious historical import when read in the context of both works as responses to the rise and fall of mid-twentieth-century fascism.

The section of Pound's long poem that comprises *The Pisan Cantos* (Cantos LXXIV-LXXXIV) was published in 1948 after being written in 1945 during Pound's detainment—for treason against the United States—at the US Army Disciplinary Training Center (DTC) near Pisa, Italy.¹⁰ Pound's indictment and arrest stemmed in large part from speeches he gave over Rome Radio beginning in 1941 in support of Benito Mussolini's fascist government (Redman 225-6), a political bent that continues in *The Pisan Cantos*. Woolf's unusual 1933 novel, on the other hand, is a biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's real-life cocker spaniel, Flush. It traces his life from a pastoral upbringing, to his gifting to Elizabeth and subsequent residence in London (including a tumultuous relationship with Robert Browning and a dognapping), through his late life and death in Italy. Perhaps surprisingly, *Flush* can be read (Snaith 631, 615) as an early experiment in the anti-fascist writing that Woolf would develop in *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts* (Pridmore-Brown). Why this is so will become abundantly apparent.

Though Woolf's feminism and liberatory politics continue to be a draw for contemporary scholars, Pound's current position in a modernist studies of comparativism and planetary

¹⁰ Moody xvii-xviii, 76, 105-6, 117, 134.

interconnectivity is fraught. As Paul Stasi has argued, “Pound wrote what can only be called World Literature” (“A Sane Balance” 362), and the lately expanded concerns of modernist scholarship are far from leaving Pound’s work behind, but there are obviously major components of Pound’s politics and writing that make him singularly unpalatable for inclusive scholarship.¹¹ Despite this, his work and influence is rarely far from any discussion of the modernist canon, unlike *Flush*, which has seen a dramatic shift in critical appeal over the years, recently garnering renewed focus thanks to posthumanism and animal studies. Although its critical visibility is far from overtaking that of Woolf’s most popular novels, *Flush*’s disciplinary position has changed considerably since 1991, when Pamela Caughie lamented that readers of the work were “nearly non-existent” (49).¹² In recent years, critics such as David Herman, Kari Weil, and Derek Ryan have called attention to the unique potential of *Flush* for making meaningful contributions to understanding of the categories and experiences of the human and the animal, in particular.¹³

When approached with the concerns of fascism in mind—Pound’s support and Woolf’s condemnation—*The Pisan Cantos* and *Flush* point out intersecting anxieties surrounding the politics of bodies. Pound puts his historical method to work litigating bodily hierarchies along racist pro-fascist lines, while Woolf relentlessly confuses such ordering in her playful but thoroughly political canine biography. What makes this pairing especially compelling is the way in which both texts deploy the inescapable figure of the nonhuman animal¹⁴ in the course of

¹¹ Beyond his well-documented antisemitism and fondness for authoritarianism, there is *The Cantos* as an assimilating project, Pound’s willful misreadings of Chinese (Kotin), and his blatant misogyny (Nicholls).

¹² Even in 2002 it was possible for Craig Smith to remark upon the novel’s canonical invisibility and the way in which it has been “dismissed...as a trivial potboiler” (348), an opinion that can be traced back to Woolf’s own self-deprecating letters and diaries (Smith 357-8).

¹³ *Flush* has also elicited a rich array of responses from a feminist lens. For Smith’s reaction to and summary of earlier feminist work on the novel, see 349 and 360n1. More recently, see Weil 82 and 88, Herman 549, and Kendall-Morwick, esp. 510-11.

¹⁴ Admittedly, I am over-generalizing here; these figures will become quite specific below. There is no “animal in general” as a meaningful and determinate category except within the logic of anthropocentrism (Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am” 399-400).

making their political cases. Animals in these texts embody both sites of a lived hierarchy, and the somatic locus of a resistance to that hierarchy: animals exceed human representation and power even as they live the difference upon which “the human” is founded. The categorical integrity of the human body in modernity is predicated upon its distinction from and dominance over the nonhuman and the animal, in a kind of human sovereignty. Yet this very move indicates that what gets called “animal” falls beyond the reach of “human” control, all while the animal is also ineradicably bound up in the definition of the human as what it defines itself against.

In what follows, I draw together the concern with fascism, particularly fascist racism, in *Flush* and *The Cantos* via their parallel turns to animals—turns that are far from coincidental. Fascism is a politics that organizes bodies hierarchically. Where this is explicitly racist and anti-Semitic, it means that some human bodies retain fully human status, while others are inscribed as less than human. Nonhuman animals are specters of this dehumanization, bodies that have long been cast to the bottom of such hierarchies on the basis of species difference. In Woolf and Pound’s meditations on fascist racism, animals return to the realm of the political with a renewed capacity to resist racism and speciesism. In both the pro-fascist and the anti-fascist account, animals trouble the certainty of the human body precisely when this body is deployed as a site of race- and species-based dominance. Animals, as I will discuss later, therefore force a reconsideration of sovereignty, where sovereignty describes the means by which some groups of modern bodies assert their political primacy over others. From this perspective we might begin to think a paradoxical, posthuman sovereignty, inhering in nonhuman bodies that are capable of both collaborating with and withdrawing from the political terms of human life, despite rarely (if ever) being entirely free from these terms.

Flush and *The Pisan Cantos* are both world-forming projects in the shadow of fascism, and the intersecting ways in which animals come to play a part in them in diverting the fallout of fascism and political tyranny makes them unique counterpoints to one-another. As Herman writes, *Flush* unveils “an inextricable entanglement not just of male, female, upper-, and lower-class life histories, but also of human and nonhuman ways of encountering the world” (547). Woolf’s experiments with the ways in which fluid subjectivities can remake the world are found also in *The Waves*, for example (Mattison 564), and *Flush* has occasionally been drawn into a discourse of human and animal worlds,¹⁵ but the consequences of thinking these worlds as an aspect of Woolf’s extended response to fascism and racism has yet to be realized. In order to make this push, I propose that these Woolfian “ways of encountering the world” be brought into conversation with the insight that we might approach *Flush* as a critique of fascist racism, and therefore a critique of a particular form of biopolitics. I thereby push the anti-fascist reading of *Flush* forward both by remarking upon how fascism in this context can be seen to undermine itself, and by evaluating the collaborative lives of the novel’s characters as a direct response to fascist ordering.

The human/animal question, as Giorgio Agamben writes in *The Open*, is always a biopolitical one: “In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man. That is to say, in its origin Western politics is also biopolitics” (80). Reading *Flush* alongside *The Pisan Cantos*, there are present two distinct veins of political modernism: the avowal of fascism (Pound), and its disavowal (Woolf).¹⁶ The former, as we will see below, undermines itself in gauging the

¹⁵ Karalyn Kendall-Morwick’s work on *Flush*, for example, appears in a special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* on “Animal Worlds in Modern Fiction.”

¹⁶ My thanks to an anonymous reviewer at *Twentieth-Century Literature* for suggesting this language of avowal and disavowal.

human/nonhuman distance it hopes to create, while the latter traverses the hierarchies that fascism centers—even, in some cases, perpetuating them—in its attack on despotism. The result is two works with vastly different ways of making political worlds that coincide in making these worlds together with nonhuman animals. Both contend with the notion that modern human subjectivity (beyond fascism alone) is a world-making mode of dominance over and difference from animals. As Donna Haraway writes, however, the world of human dominance might be remade through the telling of “stories of becoming-with” across species (*Staying with the Trouble* 119). Pound and Woolf offer stories of bodies in companionship, stories in which humans and animals elide the exclusionary bounds of their categories on their way to multispecies entanglement. In this way, they move toward a possible rethinking of any mode of political dominance predicated upon the elevating of a particular category of humanness.

II. Fascist Racism and Sovereignty’s Killable Bodies

Mussolini, the dead figurehead of Italian fascist sovereignty,¹⁷ is ever-present in *The Pisan Cantos*, his execution clearly weighing heavily on the worshipful Pound. These cantos begin with a lament of Mussolini’s death—how he was “twice crucified” (LXXIV.445)—and in ending salute him (“il Capo”) and other executed fascist officials (LXXXIV.559; Terrell 465). Extracting a counter to fascism from this text therefore requires the kind of push that *Flush* offers. In her novel, “Woolf evokes a language of racial superiority reminiscent of fascist ideas concerning anti-Semitism and Nordic superiority,” in order to critique this via an analogous contrast in canine life, between the purebred and the “mongrel” (Snaith 630-1). This arbitrary racial distinction, handed down in *Flush* by the Kennel Club, further subdivides life within the

¹⁷ Despite Mussolini’s claim to dictatorial power, it should not be ignored that fascist rule coexisted with the Italian king, Victor Emmanuel III (Grand, *Italian Fascism* 48).

realm of a particular species, not unlike the ways in which fascism parses out more and less desirable genres of human life. The making of these distinctions is in both cases a sovereign decision by a law-making body, rendering some bodies killable while elevating others, seeking to root out “extreme peril” to the cherished spheres of life (Schmitt 6). The life of the mongrel is a challenge to the Kennel Club’s fantasy of breed purity, just as the fascist fantasy of an Italian race is threatened by unsanctioned forms of life.

This is a thorough entanglement of the biological and the political, named by what has come to be understood as biopolitics. Nazism and fascism, Agamben contends, were “two properly biopolitical movements that made of natural life the exemplary place of the sovereign decision”—“properly biopolitical” because of their foundation of state power upon biological distinctions (*Homo Sacer* 129). In thinking this entanglement between life, power, and politics, we should read Woolf’s litany of breed requirements for the spaniel—and consequences for aberrance—literally and with an ear of grave concern: “Light eyes, for example, are undesirable; curled ears are still worse; to be born with a light nose or a topknot is nothing less than fatal” (6). As Derrida has noted, animals are involved in a “sacrificial structure” whereby their availability for “noncriminal putting to death” is a key aspect of anthropocentric power (“Eating Well” 112). Such a power is put directly to use by institutions like the Kennel Club, rendering killable the canine bodies that exceed its parameters of species desirability.¹⁸

Flush comes into life in the grip of the sacrificial structure of the Kennel Club, being allowed to live because his body incidentally coincides with a set of valued breed distinctions. His eventual death will likewise carry no trace of disposability, but for quite different reasons. In

¹⁸ This is to say nothing of the intersection that arises between Derrida’s sacrificeable animal and Agamben’s more frequently analyzed “homo sacer”; for a brief comparison of these two deployments of sacrifice, see Wolfe, *Before the Law* 110n34.

the passage on his death that closes *Flush*, Woolf instead emphasizes the complex interdependence and difference between Flush and Elizabeth, two bodies “Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould,” who “each, perhaps, completed what was dormant in the other,” confusing species without entirely eschewing it (161). Death weaves its way differently through *Flush* and *The Pisan Cantos*, yet in both it coalesces around the locus of sovereignty: the sovereign Mussolini’s death, the law of the Kennel Club that puts to death deviant canine bodies and allows Flush to live. And each of these sovereign forms is haunted by the fascist politics of scrubbing the rights and humanity of Jewish and non-white bodies, rendering them increasingly vulnerable to death or killing them outright. None of these deaths is the same as the others, but each takes place within the logic of biopolitics, with its different levels of sovereignty working to control and regulate life.

In Pound’s pro-fascist writing there is a codependency of Italian fascism and racism/anti-Semitism that obscures the historical relationship between the two. Unlike Nazism, Mussolini’s fascist movement was not founded directly upon racism but on “extreme nationalism” (Grand, *Italian Fascism* 114), which was fungible enough under his idolized direction to make a racist turn in the late 1930s. This pivot was made in the imperialist and segregationist measures imposed on Italian East Africa, and in the Italian government’s 1938 “Manifesto of Fascist Racism,” which began a direct assault of the state upon the rights of its Jewish population (ibid. 102, 114-5). As the racist aspects of the Italian state developed, particularly in the fallout of its 1935 invasion of Ethiopia, it further allied itself with Hitler’s Germany. In doing so, Italian fascism made plain that “its core beliefs of hierarchy and absolute obedience” were thoroughly well-suited to the racist practices of Nazism (Grand, “Mussolini’s Follies” 140): “Racial policy cut to the key issues of hierarchy and authority. Race defined who commanded and who was a

member of the nation” (ibid. 144).¹⁹ So although *Flush* predates the overt turn to racism in Italian fascism, it is a prescient allegory of fascism’s development and a perceptive diagnosis of how particular power structures are ripe for racist opportunism.

As Judith Butler notes, a “racial differential...undergirds the culturally viable notions of the human” (*Precarious Life* 33): conceptions of the human upon which law and politics are founded inevitably turn upon hierarchies of race, and these hierarchies in turn operate as dehumanizing measures. Even where notions of “equality” predominate, this racial differential works by “urging the subhuman to rise to the level of Western humanity” (Fanon 110).

Describing this dehumanization in Nazism, Roberto Esposito writes that “the animal” forms “the nonhuman part of man...in which *humanitas* folds in on itself, separating itself through an internal distinction between that which can live and that which has to die” (*Bíos* 155). It is not necessary, however, to look as far as the Nazi concentration camp, “the site of a radical dehumanization” (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 123), to appreciate that the ejection of select groups from the sphere of a “supposedly pure Italian race” (Grand, *Italian Fascism* 115) meant denying that they could be fully human in a way that the rights-having, properly Italian subject was imagined to be. While this link between dehumanization and racism may be obvious, the ways in which racist animalization and “actual” nonhuman animals interact is far less so.

Following revisions of Agamben’s and Michel Foucault’s work by thinkers like Achille Mbembe, I understand the racial exclusions of fascism as an operation of biopolitical sovereignty. In this sense, sovereignty describes not only the power embodied in a political leader, but the complex ways in which power is allocated to particular groups of bodies and

¹⁹ As Alexander De Grand shrewdly observes, there is therefore little room for lending Italian fascism any moral superiority to Nazism: “Fascism was endlessly adaptable, and nothing in its doctrine...precluded moving in a Nazi direction” (“Mussolini’s Follies” 142).

populations, to the extent that they take on a capacity to direct “control over mortality”—to decide “who is able to live and who must die” (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 66). Whiteness, for instance, names one sovereign category that expels other populations from its ranks and exposes them to risk and death in the process. However, where for Mbembe the question of sovereignty is one of how “humanity” is instrumentalized against humans (ibid. 68), I want to open this question to the ways in which nonhuman animals are excluded from and included in sovereignty’s purview. Sovereign power racializes and animalizes as it makes distinctions between genres of bodies, and “real” animals are therefore present on its spectrum as a sort of imagined baseline. Though I make this move in order to intervene in current biopolitical thought on sovereignty, I also want to keep one of its foundational formulations in mind: Carl Schmitt’s familiar notion that “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception” (5). By taking seriously the ways in which animals and dehumanized others are accounted for by sovereign power, and the ways they exceed it, we might return to Schmitt’s formula with a new eye for what that sovereign decision looks like.

III. Bodies against Tyranny

Engaging *Flush* as a critique of fascist racism is to point out not simply that the racial classification of animals is analogous to human racism, but that human racism both transcends and undermines “the human.” Fascist racism opens itself to a critique whereby its very premise—the sanctity of white, non-Jewish human exceptionalism—operates as a counter to that premise. “The human,” the racist, fascist subject, produces, by way of a contrast, a subject that it declares to be essentially dominatable. But precisely when this sovereignty decides to cordon off this subject and do away with it, the subject exceeds the boundaries placed upon it. Just as the

subject of racism never fits their stereotype, particular animals never fall fully within the strictures of “the animal” that sets them apart from humanity. But questions of power in *Flush* concern not just race and species but gender as well, as Woolf takes pains to make it clear that “anthropocentrism underwrites the phallogentrism of the literary canon” (Kendall-Morwick 508). This patriarchal context is evoked in the parallel lives of Elizabeth and Flush, a male dog, whose intertwined narrative trajectories enact “humans’ entanglement in the more-than-human contexts of multispecies life” (ibid.), depicting “a culture that mandates the leashing of dogs and women alike” (ibid. 510).²⁰ In this entanglement between raced, gendered, and taxonomized bodies, a slew of biopolitical concerns are at stake involving the policing of life.

British law, in the form of Kennel Club regulations, intercedes in Flush’s body long before his birth. Continuing to outline the rules of species membership that open the novel, Woolf’s narrator describes how

The spaniel that exhibits these points is encouraged and bred from; the spaniel who persists in perpetuating topknots and light noses is cut off from the privileges and emoluments of his kind. Thus the judges lay down the law and, laying down the law, impose penalties and privileges which ensure that the law shall be obeyed. (7)

In the novel’s closing, however, the incontrovertibility of the regulating influence of this law is put into question. By 1847, Flush and the Brownings have moved from London, to Pisa, and finally to Florence. At his last home, Flush “faced the curious and at first upsetting truth that the laws of the Kennel Club are not universal. He had brought himself to face the fact that light topknots are not necessarily fatal. He had revised his code accordingly....He was becoming daily

²⁰ See also Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto* 179.

more and more democratic” (116-117). There is perhaps some irony in the fact that the city outside of which Pound will be detained is the same one in which Flush, nearly a century prior, begins to find freedom from the laws that have bound him his entire life. Flush in this change “embraces his rebirth as a mongrel” (Kendall-Morwick 521)—he discovers, as it were, the arbitrary quality of canine race privilege: “here in Pisa, though dogs abounded, there were no ranks; all—could it be possible?—were mongrels” (Woolf 112).²¹ The point serves as a reminder—highly pertinent in Woolf’s 1933 as in our present day of racialized state apparatuses—that notions of racial purity are not only untenable, they construe the very thing they mean to destroy, as they inscribe categories of life as killable.

There is an inherent instability to the embodied categories by which Flush both benefits and is oppressed—he is a Spaniel, but still a dog—and this comes especially to light when boundaries are elided between Flush and Elizabeth. Their relationship evolves from the early days of companionship, demonstrating a correlation whereby their affects begin to reflect one-another: “Between them, Flush felt more and more strongly...a bond...so that if his pleasure was her pain, then his pleasure was pleasure no longer but three parts pain” (35). But Flush’s equal footing with Elizabeth should not be overstated. Although especially in his later life in Italy Flush is allowed a great deal of latitude, he is always and remains a pet, subject to conditions of ownership that are perhaps most apparent in his early cloistering with Elizabeth in her bedroom.²² And it remains the case that “Flush, as property, is prey to his various owners’ language and conventions” (Weil 87).²³ While animals do appear, as Flush does, in human

²¹ All parenthetical references to Woolf in this chapter are to *Flush*.

²² For relevant discussion of pets and agency, see Podberscek, Paul, and Serpell; Feuerstein; Weil 53-62.

²³ With Kendall-Morwick’s point in mind about how anthropocentrism undergirds phallogocentrism in the canon, it is also worth considering how anthropocentrism reinforces phallogocentrism as well as carnophallogocentrism (Derrida, “Eating Well” 113).

relationships characterized by growing equity and freedom, the master/pet dynamic remains in place here, a species difference that sets out a fundamentally unequal relationship. A posthuman response to the politics that hierarchizes bodies will have to come from elsewhere than the ownership relation.

As Robert Browning gradually becomes a part of Flush's and Elizabeth's lives in London, the relationship between the three grows and expands until eventually the narration proclaims, "We are all three conspirators in the most glorious of causes. We are joined in sympathy. We are joined in hatred. We are joined in defiance of black and beetling tyranny. We are joined in love" (73). This joining, unfortunately, is not to immediately carry out the utopic quality it describes; Flush's abduction follows shortly upon this rapturous moment, though he is eventually ransomed. It is possible, however, to glimpse in this familial, interspecies becoming the beginning of a collective *agencement*: "a rapport of forces that makes some beings capable of making other beings capable, in a plurivocal manner" (Despret 38). These co-conspirators are, as Vinciane Despret writes, a kind of secret agents, "undoing and redoing precarious selves (through) one another" (44).

The conspiratorial and affective aspects here are worth emphasizing. From the point at which Flush's pleasure would become "three parts pain" if he discovered that it harmed Elizabeth, here the trio reaches a point at which their affects are apparently indistinguishable and goal-oriented, the goal being a love that defies tyranny. And what is this tyranny but a sovereign power that would reject the love described? The mention of tyranny should evoke fascism, a political power (though of course not the only one) that denies the possibility of equitable relationships between humans and nonhumans. In *Flush* Elizabeth flouts patriarchal law, both by ransoming Flush from his kidnappers and by leaving England to marry Robert. In the former

case “Elizabeth chooses the love of Flush over the ‘law and justice’ espoused by her father and Mr. Browning,” and in the latter “Elizabeth refuses to sacrifice her own love for her father’s ‘law,’” eschewing a patriarchal power that pretends universality (Weil 93). The connection with Pound will become clear, as he also turned to animals as conspirators in excepting himself from the tyrannical circumstances of 1940s Italy.

IV. Worlding with Animals

Rather than encountering animals as mysterious, intermittent actors, coming and going as they will in Pound, *Flush* sustains the experience of living within Flush’s world. Woolf’s novel creates a space for the prolonged assumption of a new worldview, asking that the reader assume a different position before the laws and politics that structure our experiential worlds.

Approaching the novel as anti-fascist makes it possible to perceive in this worlding, which asks that we take the time to live in a different world (Cheah, *What Is a World?* 312), a radical posthuman critique of racial and species-based difference.

Life and politics always take place in worlds. Power, that is, creates conditions of both possibility and denial for bodies, and these bodies experience this as the structure of their world. This world is always in flux, and is the result of both oppressive forces and liberating ones. The way one’s world changes describes its worlding, which is both what happens to bodies when they are sovereignly dominated, and what can be done to remake conditions of dominance. On the level of bodies and the restrictions placed upon certain kinds of life—and the representations of these restrictions by which we come to know them—worlding constitutes a possible response to fascist biopower. Changing the conditions that structure how one lives their body in their world means taking apart the limits put into place by racism and anthropocentrism. In Woolf and

Pound, this takes place by bringing bodies together in order to remap the conditions of life dictated by politics. But while Pound and Woolf each present a certain “gift of a world,” setting forth a new world and thereby enacting a power that “radically undermines sovereign self-determination” (ibid. 301), it must be borne in mind that they also retain a capacity to inscribe dominance. The task is to pit the liberatory capacities of these works against their domineering ones, and against the oppressive political forces of their environments.

Readings of *Flush*'s nonhuman world have often focused on the potential of applying ethological and animal studies perspectives to the novel. This has illuminated a “fundamental continuity between human and nonhuman experiences” in the novel (Herman 558), to which Jakob von Uexküll's well-known study of an animal's *Umwelt*, or “dwelling-world” (Uexküll 139),²⁴ is particularly pertinent (Herman 559). Karalyn Kendall-Morwick, for instance, contends that Woolf's eye for canine experience “exhibits an arguably keener insight into canine *Umwelt* than does Uexküll himself” (517), by providing Flush with a fully-realized sense of his environment that does not reduce canine experience to a weak approximation of that of the human (ibid. 518). Uexküll, however, only gets us so far.

Though Donna Haraway's work of the mid-2000s is often called upon in discussions of *Flush*,²⁵ 2016's *Staying with the Trouble* is uniquely suited for describing the ways in which the entangled bodies of humans and nonhumans present themselves in and as worlds constantly in the process of becoming—remaining “heterogeneous partners” but always already involved in “intertwined worldings” (12-13). Haraway's description of worlding is one in which it is never possible to extricate a single world from its involvement in other worlds, unlike the *Umwelt* approach (Kull 43). From this perspective, Woolf and Pound offer an anti-fascist, anti-racist

²⁴ See also Chien.

²⁵ Kendall-Morwick 510, Feuerstein 33n3, Dubino 152.

response of bodies and worlds that are quite identifiable but ineluctably in flux, reliant upon one another. Here fascist biopower, even in its avowal, contains the anti-fascist counter.

The world and worlding of human/nonhuman bodies is often traced back to Heidegger's three theses on the notion of world, which describe stones as "worldless," animals as "poor in world" and "Man" as "world-forming" (*Fundamental Concepts* 184). In an exposition of these theses, Agamben notes that "Heidegger seeks to situate Dasein's fundamental structure—its being-in-the-world—with respect to the animal, and thus to inquire about the origin and sense of that openness which, with man, is produced in the living being" (*The Open* 50). That is, for Heidegger the proper mode of Being exists in the capacity and possibility of man, over and against the animal, which "is closed in the circle of its disinhibitors just as, according to Uexküll, it is closed in the few elements that define its perceptual world" (ibid. 51). The infinite possibilities open to human Being are unavailable to the Dasein-less animal, which can engage the world instead only through the possible activations allotted by its set of disinhibitors. This question of world is a biopolitical question, the instantiation of a biopower that intercedes to relegate life to "proper" spheres. Animals, with their less-than-human life and lack of full Being, become legally disposable. Already captivated in their impoverished ontology, animals can be captivated bodily as well in the laboratory or the zoo, or simply discarded. At the close of this essay, we will have occasion to return to this rather standard sketch of "the animal" in a different light.

The Pisan Cantos and *Flush* orient the bodies they depict along species lines, but in doing so they also open new possibilities for life in its biopolitical categories. *The Pisan Cantos*, for instance, insist (if indirectly) upon the contingency of power over life. "Whose world, or mine or theirs / or is it of none?" Pound asks in Canto LXXXI (541). Here Pound wonders at the world,

and though this wonder is couched in terms of ownership, its questioning uncertainty allows that a world, any world, may be a thing that cannot be possessed for long. This sentiment seems undercut, however, by what follows shortly after: “What thou lovest well is thy true heritage / What thou lov’st well shall not be reft from thee” (ibid.).²⁶ There seems an authentic permanence to this heritage; it is grasped tightly and cannot be stolen. A fascist, racist reading is undoubtedly available here, a declaration that lineage is definite, ineradicable, inescapable, the desirability of such an escape being predicated upon the prestige of the heritage or race in question. But there is also room for ambivalence, in that what takes precedence in the equation between “What thou lovest well” and “thy true heritage” is by no means clear. Is “true heritage” eternal, objective, what we must come to love and in no way can lose? Or does what one has learned to love well thereby become “true heritage,” which we must protect? These questions are the question of the world itself, the “true heritage” of which remains open. And so these lines return us to their more well-known companions: “What thou lovest well remains, / the rest is dross” (540-1). What one loves can only be what is left when we are bereft of all else. Yet these remains can themselves only be a kind of dross, a remnant, an excess, a waste product of which we cannot be rid, that attaches itself to our “heritage” and which we have little choice but to love.

The world is in these remains. The world is at once mine, theirs, nobody’s. It is what cannot be lost, while alive, what can only define that life and yet be not at all up for definition by a sole subject. We are constantly deciding upon our own world, of course—what is of relevance to us, what we encounter and how we understand it—but this decision-making capacity cannot be reduced to a single sovereign subject. Instead, the world is constantly decided upon in collaboration and antagonism with power and with those others we encounter, human and

²⁶ Further complicating this is that these two lines, written almost identically but in reverse order, also precede the line beginning “Whose world.”

nonhuman; the world we know comes out of what remains from those encounters, what traces have been left by each interlocutor. Whatever is left, cast outside our world, is certainly “dross,” but it is also of an unknown, impossible value as the possible stuff of our future world. Schmitt’s language of sovereignty is at hand here: if one cannot “decide” alone upon the rules of their world and possible exceptions therefrom, one can hardly be sovereign over oneself—one cannot generate the requisite “instance of competence” whereby the decision “receives an autonomous value” (Schmitt 31). These concerns of the world, the sovereign state and self, and the animal, are all bound up together, and are especially pressing in the context of mid-twentieth-century racist fascism, itself a world-making project.

V. Posthuman Pound

The intersecting concerns of world, law, and sovereignty are embodied as well in Pound, in the fascist poet caged for the vociferous and public support of a politics that Woolf decried. While Flush travels to Italy and discovers escape from a biopower that made of him both “an aristocrat among dogs, as well as an oppressed figure” (Snaith 621), Pound personally embraces there a code of exclusion/inclusion couched in just such bodily distinctions. His poem, however, belies such categories. “When Pound’s nature can no longer be deciphered, can no longer serve as immediate ideological evidence,” as Cary Wolfe has argued is the case in *The Pisan Cantos*, “then the ideology that once held it captive is suddenly...revealed *as* ideology, its crisis enacted not by what the poet says but by what he *cannot* say” (*Limits of American Literary Ideology* 181). To my thinking, this is particularly the case for the overwhelming presence of animals in *The Pisan Cantos*, a presence that cannot be dismissed as idle observation nor fully addressed as a newfound interest in “close study of the natural world” (Payne 74). These animals in no way

serve as window dressing, nor do they constitute an ethological analysis that is extricable from the poem's political content. There is no accounting for the animals here, except by reading them against *The Cantos'* avowed politics, as an aspect of "nature" that, escaping its ideological bounds, asserts the unspeakable need for collaborative life together across embodied divisions. In this is a becoming-posthuman of Pound's poem.

There is no point in avoiding the racism of *The Pisan Cantos*; in fact, it needs to be emphasized that racism and desire for engaging nonhuman animals go hand-in-hand in Pound's text, if animals are to be read as an antiracist presence. As in *Flush*, there is here an essential link between the politics of bodily dominance and what in isolation looks like innocent musing on the natural world. And so, with trepidation, I cite from Pound: "and the lark squawk has passed out of season / whereas the sight of a good nigger is cheering / the bad'uns wont look you straight" (LXXIX.505). The racism of Pound's dualistic gaze requires little comment, but the pairing of this with the disappearance of the lark squawk is revealing. The poem passes without pause from musing on the already-gone animal (who will, however, return next season) to splitting the subject of the Black other who, even when a "cheering" presence, is so only as a caricature. The interplay of this dehumanizing racism with a fascination with the nonhuman animal is key to reading Pound's poem against itself. That its racisms exist side-by-side with flights into the nonhuman undercuts the bodily certainty of the racist position. As Jean-Michel Rabaté has remarked, Pound's fascism was "debunked or exploded" by the poet's own writing (109)—but any dialectic of this kind is hardly obvious on the surface. The missing lark squawk, to return to Wolfe, in no way offers evidence directly reinforcing or countering racism, but it does suggest that an ideology is itself missing, that its desired referent is absent. Our human bodies, Pound

both realizes and suppresses in *The Pisan Cantos*, are changeable and dependent upon others, needful of conspiring with the company of life in many forms.

For Paul Stasi, Pound's writing creates an aesthetic world that reflects the submerged hybridity of culture (367) through the activations of the art object, asserting an important linkage between the nonhuman object and the composition of the human subject (ibid. 369). There is, however, another important form of nonhuman collaboration at work in *The Cantos*, which Stasi's focus on the object makes difficult to discern. Stasi closes his article by pondering the final lines of Canto XLIX, which run as follows:

Imperial power is? and to us what is it?

The fourth; the dimension of stillness.

And the power over wild beasts. (245)

Why, Stasi wonders, "is the Dionysian power over wild beasts important in Paradise?" (373). As I see it, this question underscores the necessity of centering animals in reading Pound. What appears elusive in these lines is the precise way in which "Imperial power," "stillness," and "power over wild beasts," are interrelated aspects of the human order at the core of Pound's paradise. To achieve the salvation of a "paradiso / terrestre" (CXVII.822) in the terms of Canto XLIX would mean instantiating a clear dominance of the human over the "wild beast," in a definitive break between the two.²⁷ "Imperial power" is a straightforward expression of sovereignty, which is tethered directly in these lines with the power to control the untamed animal, to manifest stillness through an unshakeable grip upon the other. This can only happen in the creation of an uncontaminated gap between sovereign power and the beast, played out

²⁷ For context, the question of whether Adam exercised this power over animals in Eden has been an important source of theological meditation, as Agamben notes (*The Open* 21-2).

visually in the blank space between the lines, a distancing accentuated by a new, undisturbed “dimension” before any notice of the animal, who is only truly glimpsed in the final word. The “beast” of Canto XLIX is the deferred premise of an idealized sovereign power, a nonhuman wildness that sovereignty must tame if it is to attain a utopic form. Sovereignty requires the wild animal as proving ground for its mastery—never succeeding in any project of total domestication, it seeks the animal constantly in its attempts at seeking itself. This sovereignty in Pound is not simply an abstract question of power’s representation—it is *inscribed upon Pound’s own body* when he is set before the law in the Pisan army base.

Like *Flush*, *The Pisan Cantos* are singularly concerned with the presence of animals, and Pound’s writing in them is populated by a vast assortment. From the beginning of his confinement on May 24, 1945, until June 18, Pound was kept in an open-air cell that he called the “gorilla cage,” with a concrete floor and walls made of wire nets (Moody xviii, 118). After June 18 Pound was moved to the improved shelter of a tent, provided some materials for writing, and allowed greater freedom of movement (Moody xviii). The circumstances of Pound’s imprisonment at Pisa led to the creation of a section of *The Cantos* that stands apart from the rest. The long poem makes a formal shift in this section, departing from “the stacking up of object symbols” that had been central to it so far and incorporating a greater degree of lived immediacy (Rabaté 126)—but it also makes a political shift. “Italy’s defeat, the execution of Il Duce, the failure of the fascist dream, the incarceration in a prison camp near Pisa, and the possibility of execution for betrayal,” all precipitate major revisions to the by now well-established historical and aesthetic thrust of the poem (ibid.). Pound’s experiences in the gorilla cage and the subsequent writings in his tent at the DTC medical compound form a point in *The*

Cantos at which the symbol recedes, the historical becomes the personal, and the poet enters his poem bodily.

The life of the captive author and his poem turn here to nonhuman agents, and this plays out as a “becoming with” between poet and animal. “If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism, then we know that becoming is always becoming *with*—in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake” (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 244). This is a shaping of the ongoing mixture of self and other, which we experience only in the snapshot of the present. Pound, of course, always chooses who is in the world of his poem, but he does not choose the real-life bodies that turn up before him in his limited milieu. Animals challenge human exceptionalism in Pound. Though it is the animal that is often characterized by its cageability, animals in *The Pisan Cantos* repeatedly escape before Pound’s caged body. Jailed for his vociferous support of a fascist regime of dehumanization, Pound finds himself dehumanized, treated as he imagines a gorilla might be. The freedom of movement that he witnesses in animals around him attests to that “foolishness of human exceptionalism” that Haraway points out, but more so, it serves as a reminder of how humanity constantly dehumanizes itself in asserting its exceptionalism, and that this coercion and punishment leave always a remainder of the nonhuman it cannot capture. This is not a straightforward matter of rejecting human exceptionalism for co-becoming; the two are themselves entangled, as worries about fear of nonhuman contamination breed reactionary political responses, which in their dehumanizing punishments open sites of animal freedom and reveal the essential links between humans and animals. And this is what takes place in *The Pisan Cantos*.

Becoming with, as Haraway describes it, is a “sympoietic” practice of “making-with,” which is what Pound—intentionally or not—enacts in his animal engagements (*Staying with the*

Trouble 5). This section of cantos finds Pound gathering together world history and literature in and through a caged body among other bodies. But this process is never straightforward or even compassionate in Pound's hands, complicating the collaboration that Haraway emphasizes. From the opening page of *The Pisan Cantos*, Pound emphasizes ongoingness and unfinishedness, turning anew in these opening lines to the becoming of Taoism and "the process"²⁸ by engaging with nonhuman movement (rain, wind) (445; Terrell 362). There is a sense of change, of place, of some sort of movement toward a more peaceful life. But Pound does not withdraw from the political troubles by which he found himself in the DTC. Instead, these troubles become further "muddled" in his animal environment (Haraway 2016b: 174n7). The "enormous tragedy" of Mussolini's death that opens *The Pisan Cantos* immediately takes on an animal lexicon, first through the language of taxidermy in a comparison with Manes, founder of Manichaeism, "tanned and stuffed" (LXXIV.445). Following this is the presence of maggots, feasting literally upon Mussolini, "the dead bullock," and feasting also (as Pound would likely have seen it) upon the spoils of Mussolini's political successes, "maggots" being a derogatory term for the anti-Mussolini Partisans (ibid.). Pound then turns to Eliot, "the Possum," as he emphasizes that the execution of Mussolini marks the end of a world (ibid.). (Terrell 362)

These animal allusions, all occurring in the first nine lines of *The Pisan Cantos*, set the stage for the wealth of animal references to follow, running the gamut from the literal, to the playful, to the symbolic. What has been insufficiently examined in these cantos is the way in which the historical landscape of *The Cantos* becomes bound up with the fleshly life of nonhuman animals, and what effect this has on the poem's politics. Returning to his poem after the animalization of his experience in the gorilla cage, still a prisoner, Pound turned to his

²⁸ For an extended treatment of "the process" in *The Pisan Cantos*, see Monk, who glosses this phrase as "the irrefutable linking of man to the world around him" (225).

nonhuman environment in a manner that makes of his history and politics an ongoing negotiation involving a menagerie of bodies. *The Pisan Cantos* are populated by ants, pigs, sheep, geese, “Ladro the night cat” (LXXIV.458), possums, wasps, tigers, oxen, the “birds on a wire” (LXXIX.505) that form Canto LXXV’s musical score (470-1), and a butterfly. These animals become agents in the messy composition of the poem and of the poet, its *composting* (Latour 473-4). As Wolfe puts it, in these cantos “the poet now looks to the natural world not for the ideological truth to which it is transparent but rather for its absolute otherness” (*The Limits of American Literary Ideology* 181). There is no clear ideology present in the coming together of human and animals, only a radical uncertainty that forces Pound’s poem beyond the human.

VI. In Flight—Cats and Butterflies

Where animals enter *The Pisan Cantos*, they remake them in new entanglements of place, time, and subjectivity. In a scene with a cat in the opening canto of the section—perhaps the same Ladro met later—there is a thick palimpsest that retains the historical emphasis characteristic of *The Cantos*, while remaining tethered to Pound’s situated perspective:

from the death cells in sight of Mt. Taishan @ Pisa
as Fujiyama at Gardone
when the cat walked the top bar of the railing
and the water was still on the West side
flowing toward the Villa Catullo. (LXXIV.447)

Mountains in China, Japan, and Italy are intermingled, set alongside a river that is at once still, lying dormant on “the West side,” and still flowing, still moving toward Catullus’ home (Terrell 365). In the midst of this dense landscape a cat crosses the line of vision, traversing the boundary

of Pound's prison, resulting in a human/nonhuman environment where the organizing power of the poet becomes confused. We can only see the poet reinscribed here as trapped, against the freedom of the cat. So while the topographical and temporal range of these lines is impressive, the cat evinces a simple bodily capacity to depart or remain that, in ways that would have been most essential to Pound in the moment of composition, exceeds them.

The present is present here, the cat retracing the DTC's limits as it enters Pound's historical/environmental reveries. Here is Pound's "time to make precise discriminations and distinctions....[that] multiply rather than erase differences" (Rabaté 111), the key distinction being not the poet's already-established capacity to meld historical sites into a new image, but the appearance of autonomous nonhuman life. While the cat at first seems to interrupt Pound's musings, the "when" beginning the third line links the assemblage of mountains with the waiting waters and back toward the Villa Catullo with a new current. The cat unknowingly collaborates in this inscription, remaining within a present that is no longer Pound's alone, a present drawn both backward and forward in time. Perhaps most significant here is the animal's liminal quality, in a very real and literal sense: the cat traverses the DTC railing, the point marking both freedom and confinement, a physical limit that poetry cannot erase. In these lines, it is only the nonhuman life that has the privilege of departing the DTC, a privilege the cat only partially deploys.

In Canto LXXVI, Pound twice remarks on an insect departing his cell, and in both cases the critter becomes entangled in reveries of ancient Greece. In the first instance:

Arachne che mi porta fortuna;

Athene, who wrongs thee?

[.....]

That butterfly has gone out thru my smoke hole (481)

The line in Italian that opens this encounter refers to Arachne of Greek myth, metamorphosed into a spider by Athena for challenging the goddess to a weaving contest, and forced in consequence to spend the remainder of her life weaving; this Arachne “brings me good luck” (“che mi porta fortuna”; Terrell 399). Unending creation appears to be Pound’s analogous punishment, his own weaving that is drawn to a butterfly it is unable to capture, yet does capture in the poem’s scene. This butterfly in flight is present only in the trace of its absence. Like the cat, the butterfly occupies a spatial position that is both within and without, a nonhuman liminality that is directly antithetical to Pound’s imprisonment.

The writing of the disappearing animal into the poem evokes a certain “becoming-animal,” a “line of escape” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 12): “To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold...to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone” (13). A participatory movement, the charting of a “path of escape,” the marking of a threshold, and a degree of formal dissolution, are all taking place, without however achieving the transcendence of a “world of pure intensities.” There is a push and pull, both a making, a weaving, and an unmaking, a dissipation. In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Kafka*, this becoming-animal and the “creative line of escape” draw upon the historical-political energies that come to dominate the twentieth century; such an escape “vacuums up in its movement all politics, all economy, all bureaucracy, all judiciary...Fascism, Stalinism, Americanism” (41). “Vacuuming up” would not be an inapt description of Pound’s general method, but more to the point, Deleuze and Guattari’s connection of becoming-animal, lines of escape, and fascism, points to a telling knot in these cantos: animals, as sites for the poet’s wistful fleeing of his situation, are not a locus for reprieve from the political, nor anything to be “turned into” in an escape from human concerns. Instead,

where the poem looks to animals in flight from a distinctly human guilt and in continuing a labor that, as the luck of Arachne would have it, is already an animal task, the political is continually implicated. The political is still present in the escape from politics: fascism and Americanism²⁹ follow Pound's move across the threshold into the nonhuman. In his hands, we perceive a flight with animals that, rather than leaving behind the political, only further involves it in life, but of a different kind.

The butterfly reappears toward the close of Canto LXXVI:

bricks thought into being ex nihil
suave in the cavity of the rock la concha

ΠΟΙΚΙΛΟΘΡΟΝ', 'ΑΘΑΝΑΤΑ

that butterfly has gone out thru my smoke hole (482)

Carroll Terrell connects this instance of the smoke hole to an allusion to Goethe's *Faust* that follows shortly, a reference to a scene in which Wagner attempts to "make a human being" (qtd. in Kaufmann 36). "A human?" Mephisto responds, "And what pair in passion / Have you locked in the chimney pipe?" (ibid.).³⁰ The human under construction in the canto might be Pound himself, a reflection of his captivity, which he insists on drawing animals within. The doubly-fleeing butterfly comes into play here alongside the impassivity of the "richly enthroned, immortal" ("ΠΟΙΚΙΛΟΘΡΟΝ', 'ΑΘΑΝΑΤΑ") Aphrodite³¹ (Terrell 401). As in Pound's apparent alliance with Arachne, who challenged Athena, there is a certain subversion of divine power here, a questioning of the mythical order, which we might link to a questioning of the myth of the Duce. Arachne's punishment is presented as Pound's luck, the chance to become re-

²⁹ We might also recall that Stalinism was not without interest to Pound; e.g. Redman 249-50.

³⁰ Terrell has "smoke hole" for "chimney pipe" (401).

³¹ The line is Sappho's, from a hymn to Aphrodite (Terrell 401).

embodied and to ceaselessly fabricate life. And here is Aphrodite: sovereign, enthroned, but absent in any literal sense, present only by way of allusion to her throne—and she is effortlessly usurped in the next line by a butterfly that we also cannot quite glimpse. In fact, the allusion can come in the following line to be literally read as modifying the butterfly, “richly enthroned, immortal.” The poem here ekes out a quiet position, a “cavity of the rock,” from which to argue the fragility of sovereign immutability. So we might read in it too a critique of the power that came to order Pound’s life, of that sovereign myth of Mussolini whose rule was as solidly real as brick but came from nothing (“ex nihil”)—had no eternal basis—and disappeared just as suddenly. (Terrell 401)

With Deleuze and Guattari and Haraway in mind, we should not read this potential critique as a simple opposition—and it is, to be sure, a critique that reads Pound’s poem against him, reads what might be disavowed by *The Pisan Cantos* against his own continuing avowal of fascism and Il Duce. Pound’s response to power in *The Pisan Cantos* is shaped by the desire for escape from the DTC, thought through a repeated turn to escaping animals. The poem’s challenge to sovereign power plays out as a challenge to human exceptionalism. We should think this power as Mussolini’s sovereign rule, as the American force that cages Pound, and as the sovereignty of a humanity predicated on racial and species privilege. Each of these sovereignties fails Pound, and he seems to realize, if indirectly, that a “purely” human history cannot offer a sufficient response to his circumstances. In its place we encounter the muddle of *The Pisan Cantos*, an uneven but collaborative project of representing the political circumstances of one isolated man, a representation that is quite the opposite of isolating.³²

³² Isolation too is a fundamental quality of sovereign exceptionalism (Derrida, *Beast & the Sovereign* 8).

VII. Posthuman Sovereignty

In Pound, the only thing that remains clear is that we are in a muddle: eternal sovereignty, pure categorical dominance of some privileged human group, the removal of the human from the beast—none of these comes out clean in Pound’s poem. Recalling Heidegger’s three theses of the world, Herman has made the case that “texts like *Flush* give lie to Heidegger’s characterization of nonhuman animals as poor in world, . . . foregrounding the plurality and diversity of ways of world-making across as well as within species” (560). Contra Heidegger, *Flush* is “replete with other worlds—webs of worlds,” which enact the multifaceted, unknowable life of its animal other (Dubino 151). As in Pound, of course, it cannot be forgotten that this all takes place in a representation dictated by authorial choice, and that perhaps there is an unavoidable anthropocentrism to writing animals in this way. And yet, these texts make us newly capable of questioning what constitutes that human perspective, and how stable it really is. The canine world of *Flush* cannot be composed without the animal, without the presence of a beast that can only be anthropomorphized and familiarized—and yet retains its utter difference. If the world is something made together, between species, in an interchange the input factors of which are unquantifiable, then the question becomes much less one of comparison between human and animal experience, or even of appropriation: the representation of an animal’s life is beholden always to the way in which that animal reveals itself to us—in an intimate, familial way in Woolf, and in a fleeting, lyrical way in Pound.

These human-animal exchanges are a complex matter of capture and release. Pound’s lines of escape and the interspecies “response-abilities” cultivated in Woolf disturb hierarchies of species life (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 98), and in doing so they disturb the sovereign power of the human. These are becomings-animal, they are worlds formed in uneasy alliances

between human and animal that can—despite what Heidegger says—only evince the animal’s capability for world-forming. Humans are world-forming, animals are world-forming, the two together are world-forming. There is an element of limitation at work here, a closure, but not in the realm of the animal—rather it is *the human itself*, the rigid, policing, totalitarian tendency, that is poor in world, that purposefully restricts its “perceptual world” (Agamben, *The Open* 51). Fascism operates precisely within a “circle of...disinhibitors” by limiting its capacity to be affected by bodies and forms of life that do not meet its threshold of humanity (ibid.). Anti-Semitism is only the most obvious aspect of this.

And so the fascist world-making that supposedly defines the human also renders the human poor in world—it animalizes itself, according to its own logic.³³ Here too, then, is a becoming-animal, whereby fascism animalizes itself in flight from all that it has inscribed as inhuman. The vacuuming-up described by Deleuze and Guattari can hardly be more apparent: in ejecting its nonhuman, racialized other, the fascist becomes an animal—or rather, the fascist becomes the caricature of animal imagined by Heidegger in all its poverty—as it attempts to absorb total control of the law and of life. Dehumanizing politics dehumanizes itself. Small wonder, then, that the fascist Pound, finding himself in the DTC beholden to a new law within which he had little agency, turned again to the animal, to the beast, in escape from a law that was now alien. What one finds in reading *The Pisan Cantos* and *Flush*, however, is that inviting animals into the work does quite the opposite than shoring up the certainty of human dominance and independence. Instead, it turns our gaze to the mysterious sovereignty that animals retain for themselves as they come and go, revealing and withholding their lives.

³³ In his account of Heidegger, Agamben writes of a similar phenomenon: the “awakening of the living being to its own being-captivated, this anxious and resolute opening to a not-open, is the human” (*The Open* 70).

As a peculiarly human dominance, sovereignty cherishes isolation from the nonhuman, just as Pound desired to rid western politics of what he perceived to be the usurious “infection” of a Jewish economic conspiracy (qtd. in Redman 243). Yet there is “a certain analogy between the beast and the sovereign, the beast that sometimes seems to be the sovereign, like the beast that is outside or above the law” (Derrida, *Beast & the Sovereign* 4). Those who get called “beasts” by a power attempting to render itself sovereign also take on an aspect of sovereignty through being definitionally excepted from the law. The nonhuman animals in Pound carry the sovereign quality of legal exception that is nominally denied them, just as Pound’s increasingly malicious anti-Semitism only caricatures Jewish people into something bizarre, unreal, and far beyond the purview of the fascist laws that might curtail their imagined crimes.

In a twist on Schmitt’s formula, the dehumanized possess capacities of sovereignty that exceed those of law-setting legal bodies. If “the human” is a fascist strategy for categorizing certain forms of life as sovereign over and against others, and if these others themselves become sovereign—excepted from law, outside of its proper sphere—in that very move, then we might begin to think how sovereign dehumanization opens upon a kind of *posthuman sovereignty*. In the case of the DTC’s animals, they have the ability to simply *decide* (to gesture back to Schmitt’s language) to leave the space where law is being exercised—to except themselves. In doing so, they leave traces in Pound’s aspirations of regaining his own sovereignty. For racialized, dehumanized people, however, such decisions are rarely easily available. Yet in the insight that dehumanization asserts its own limitation is a durable critique of racism and of speciesism. The two are hardly the same—*except where a sovereign humanity treats them as exactly the same*. And so the human, rather than being some desirable standard of legal belonging, offers only the limited world of a particular biopolitics, beyond which is the

possibility of collaborative life in the making of a new world in which fascist racism and species hierarchy can have no place.

These questions of the animal and the human, of the sovereign exception, are intimately bound up with questions of modernism and modernity. Involving these questions in one-another points us toward new, posthuman ethical possibilities of modernism. In *Flush*, as David Herman writes, Woolf “uses modernist methods of narration to resituate the practice of biography in a transspecies context” (“Modernist Life Writing” 561). This, Herman continues, is both “life writing” and “writing life,” an “endeavor of documenting and engaging with nonhuman as well as human ways of encountering the world” (561). Pound’s experiments in *The Cantos* are likewise of crucial relevance to the ongoing posthumanist worlding of modernist studies. The (imagined) separateness of the human as a sovereign species category that also—as is discussed in the chapters that follow—acts as a gendered and a racial category, is constitutive of modern subjectivity. The modern subject is coded, in a particular time and place, through its capacity to distinguish itself from and to control what it is not, in a domination at once reinforced and subverted by modernist literature.

To go beyond the canonical concerns of modernist studies it is essential to position modernist writing in its ongoing potential to disrupt the sovereign distinctions that continue to organize our worlds. In the next chapter I turn to gendered sovereignty in D. H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* and Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In doing so, I engage with the role of imperialism and colonialism in forming the modern western subject, as well as how this intersects with the gendered distinctions made by biopolitics. Worlding, as I argue, both describes these hierarchical distinctions and frames a project of undermining them. My reading brings out gender’s limiting

capacity as well as its openness, situating the purportedly biological divisions between male and female bodies in time, place, and power, and uncovering a capacity for remaking our bodies through dialogue with modernism and the postcolonial.

Chapter 2

Becoming Indifferent: A Feminist Response to Biopower

Indifferent one, keep still.

-Luce Irigaray (207)

Biopolitical theory has often suffered from a lack of specificity, in the all-too-rare cases when it fixates on the gendering of bodies. This theory aptly diagnoses the ways in which life has become inextricable from politics, and vice versa—how populations are made to flourish or abandoned to die by states, laws, and other populations—but at its core it remains Eurocentric and masculine, crying out for feminist analysis. Gendered life, being unevenly privileged and degraded within politics along lines that are supposedly biological, must be a primary site for such analysis. Here I build upon the species-based discussion of sovereignty in the previous chapter in order to think sovereignty through gender. To do so, I attempt a counter to some major strains of biopolitical thought through comparative readings of two twentieth-century novels: D. H. Lawrence’s 1915 *The Rainbow* and Jean Rhys’ Caribbean novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, first published in 1966. These works, I will argue, expose the self-undermining grounds of modern power as it attaches itself to gendered bodies, power which—operating in the management of different species of human life—can only constitute Foucauldian biopower (“*Society Must Be Defended*” 243). Below, I address the mechanisms of this biopower through readings of Lawrence and Rhys in a move to further describe, and destabilize, the heterogeneous experience of dominance under the regime of gendered biopolitics.

The Rainbow and *Wide Sargasso Sea* offer, respectively, a modernist British genealogy of gendered relationships, and an intimate archive of a semi-sovereign female subject.³⁴ Together these novels articulate the uneven exchanges in male/female relationships that underlie the formation of western masculine sovereignty. Unlike under classical royal sovereignty, in modernity sovereignty is dispersed throughout various political decision-making institutions and privileged groups. This is a fundamental result of the growing entanglement of politics and life: sovereign power can today no longer be located in a particular body that stands apart but inheres instead in privileged sets of bodies that take on the capacity to *decide* upon the disposal of lives of others.³⁵ Here I focus on the masculine aspect of this power—a sovereignty that has become attached to the “properly” political bodies of Men, which are set over and against the bodies of those gendered as women. This sovereignty is instituted in the gendered differing that creates the dominating category of “Man”—“the human being par excellence” (Lugones 744)—an imagined masculine political body that is fully, properly human and thus allowed full participation in state and law. Man’s body is expressed as a “natural” inevitability—“‘Man’ is a purely ontogenetic/purely biological conception of being, who then creates ‘culture’” (Wynter 2).

Gendered biopower functions as a means of situating this masculine power within the biological spectrum of the human. Only within the imaginary political space of western Man do we find proper, legal bodies (Weheliye 135). Law, dominance, and power hinge on the presence of—as Bonnie Mann has pointed out—a “sovereign masculinity.” The non-masculine other therefore comes to exist as something less than human, in an embodied caesura within the

³⁴ In a literal sense, it might seem anachronistic to address modern biopolitics through two novels set in the early-mid nineteenth century. The twentieth-century mechanisms of power from within which these novels were written, however, cannot be extracted from their historical content, and the past of biopower is hardly irrelevant when examining its more recent developments.

³⁵ As in Schmitt (5).

species.³⁶ Engaging these terms becomes newly possible through artistic representations that demonstrate, practice, and resist political terms of dominance. Gender, as a biopolitical terrain for inscribing “properly” human grounds, is both limiting and freeing, inscribing women as a dominated political group while also highlighting a shared responsibility for remaking sovereignty to counter this politic. “Humanity’s face has been the face of man,” Donna Haraway writes; “Feminist humanity must have another shape” (“Ecce Homo” 86).

Lawrence’s novel describes an extended series of gendered world-making, as generations of the Brangwen family are forced to unmake and remake their identities and lives with other men and women. *The Rainbow* traces the Brangwen lineage from circa 1840 to 1905, detailing the shifting passions and the growth and crumbling of relationships across three generations of Brangwens. The novel’s opening chapters—which I focus on in my analysis here—center on Tom Brangwen’s courtship of and marriage to Lydia Lensky. As the rest of the novel unfolds, its narrative turns to Lydia’s daughter from a previous marriage, Anna, and her marriage to Tom’s nephew Will Brangwen, before the work becomes dominated in its latter chapters by their first child, Ursula. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in turn, relates in three parts the life of white Creole woman Antoinette Cosway, from her youth in Jamaica, to her honeymoon in Dominica with her unnamed husband, to her caged existence in England as her husband’s ward. The novel rewrites the history of *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha Mason, “giv[ing] voice to the previously silent madwoman” (Donaldson 100), especially by developing her youth and relationships with Black women, including Antoinette’s childhood friend Tia, and her nurse and domestic worker Christophine.

³⁶ Obviously, the non-Man exclusion acts differently upon the bodies of differently gendered and sexed individuals in a variety of ways, as it does on queer and transgender persons; sovereignty is not solely concerned with the bodies of women, straight or otherwise, who themselves do not form totalizable categories. For one example of work in transgender theory undertaken through an approach analogous to mine, see Stallings, esp. 205-211.

The Rainbow, which I examine first, sets out the uncanny instability of a sovereignty that rests upon self-identity and unmistakable gendered coherence. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, on the other hand, dramatizes the mechanisms of gendered sovereignty by emphasizing the insidious and variable means by which gender-based dominance binds and others. Both evoke uncanny experiences of the world, a world that is supposed to arise between one's self and place, but that in practice is determined through fantasies of a male ideal. In focusing here on the sovereign machinery of gender, I take apart the gendered component of the experiencing self—a self that emerges as uncanny and unfinished, never achieving the embodied wholeness that masculine dominance pretends. The sovereignty of Man is tenuous at its core, opening possibilities for new sovereignties.

I assert a new feminist praxis in the course of this chapter, that of the responsibility to become *indifferent*: to take account of and then disregard the contingency of the world that Man has put in place, in favor of envisioning new worlds. Indifference is a creative practice that, as Rachel Hollander has pointed out, offers a “profoundly different political stance, one that entails something other than mere neutrality” (83). The possibility of that “something other”—other worlds, other bodies, other sovereignties—is what I develop below. In the section that follows, I briefly situate *The Rainbow* in a discussion of gendering and biopolitics, prefiguring a more thorough analysis of these issues in the novel in section IV, before I turn to *Wide Sargasso Sea* in section V.

I. Gendering the Biopolitical Body

Gendering is a practice of personal-political world-building, a collaborative and antagonistic negotiation with social pressures and standards in the construction of a self that

entails particular legal obligations, privileges, and restrictions. As such, gender is a contingency that arises within the social norms of a given place and moment—which is far from saying that gender is easily malleable or ultimately nonexistent, or that the ramifications for adherence or nonadherence to a particular gender are trivial. As Judith Butler puts it, “Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time” (*Gender Trouble* 191). Gendering, analogous to but different from racializing, furthers the organizations of biopower and sovereignty along dubiously biological premises that continuously affect life (Repo, *Biopolitics of Gender* 146). The result, as a youthful Tom Brangwen experiences early on in *The Rainbow*, is the conventional organization of men and women into spheres proper to each: “In the close intimacy of the farm kitchen, the woman occupied the supreme position. The men deferred to her in the house, on all household points, on all points of morality and behaviour. The woman was the symbol for that further life which comprised religion and love and morality” (13). As Tom finds in his young experience with a prostitute, transgression of these spheres of proper masculinity and femininity could come as “something of a shock” (13). For the nineteenth-century Englishwoman, as Tom observes, privileges might be mixed with constraints in a way that makes the one inextricable from the other. A woman can hold a “supreme position,” yet be constrained to the kitchen; she can be the authority on “religion and love and morality,” yet as such be relegated to the status of a “symbol.” Excepted from full life herself, the woman points the way for others toward “that further life.”

Although *The Rainbow* has frequently generated discussion concerning sex, even sex and politics,³⁷ it has yet to figure into a sustained conversation on the biopolitical implications of

³⁷ E.g. Milne.

Lawrence's representations—though Lawrence's work at large has begun to be discussed in this way.³⁸ The 1915 novel emerged during a period at which the body was coming to take on a central role in the modern western legislation and organization of life through biopower. A key way in which this organization would eventually be enacted was by the institutionalization of sex, and later gender, as loci for the study of life. In Foucault's terms, twentieth-century western society is a society “‘with a sexuality’: the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used” (*History of Sexuality* 147). This is a society of biopower and biopolitics (ibid. 143).

Lois McNay notes that Foucault's analysis of sex and the body has been powerfully generative for feminist thinking, particularly because Foucault “provide[s] a way of conceiving of the body as a concrete phenomenon without eliding its materiality with a fixed biological or prediscursive essence” (128), and other feminist writers have developed Foucault's thinking on sexuality and biopower in order to more fully theorize the intersection between sex and race.³⁹ Problems with a Foucauldian feminism, however, arise from Foucault's “failure to consider how gender ideologies are mobilized within institutional settings to produce asymmetrical relations and his silence on the question of the production of female bodies” (McNay 132). Foucault's lack of gendered specificity in his institutional analysis, his overlooking of the ways that bodies are made female, and his suggestions of bodily passivity before biopower (ibid. 134), undermine his ongoing promise for feminist criticism, but his work yet provides—as I use it here—a historicized and nonessentializing groundwork for thinking feminism through biopower.

³⁸ See in particular West-Pavlov.

³⁹ E.g. McWhorter.

The body within biopolitics is placed under examination for determining the characteristics by which it qualifies as life. As numerous scholars have articulated, the strategies of politics—law, justice, the formation of the nation-state—are predicated upon what power might “discover” about the body, and how it might thereby manipulate bodies and their production of the human species. The question of gender—or, for Foucault, that of sexuality⁴⁰—becomes within modernity and biopower a question of organizing the human. Women, particularly in a reproductive capacity, have long been targeted by biopolitical state strategies of population management, as feminist critics have meticulously detailed.⁴¹ As Jemima Repo has made plain, gender—which arose in the mid-twentieth century as a lens for making distinctions within the supposedly natural biological operation of sex—has become precisely the grounds upon which biopower continues to organize sexed bodies. “[G]ender was born as a new *apparatus* for the regulation of life processes,” and gender has subsequently become a terrain of both control and resistance (*Biopolitics of Gender* 48). While I take seriously here the terms that biopower employs to define bodies, and that feminists have applied to resist patriarchy, my own feminist response to biopower is not an attempt to further delineate gender in a way that sets it against power, but to open gender as an embodied form of life to the ways in which it exceeds any staid defining.

II. The Sovereignty of Man

⁴⁰ I mostly use “gender” here, rather than sex. Though the two terms are hardly interchangeable, I do this in order to bring the biopolitical processes at issue into the parlance of contemporary conversation on sexed bodies. Repo’s *The Biopolitics of Gender* is immensely helpful here as a historical articulation of how gender entered discourse and biopolitics through 1950s sexology, and as a genealogy of the function of gender in a variety of theoretical practices, such as feminism and psychology. See esp. 1-5, 74, 131. For a brief discussion of the question of sex/gender terminology, see Repo, “*Herculine Barbin*” 85-6.

⁴¹ Deveaux 229; Hannah 1041.

Biopower and biopolitics are bound up in questions of sovereignty, but not quite along the lines in which Foucault was discussing sovereignty in the mid-1970s. In this section I outline a few key theories of sovereignty, especially in biopolitical and indigenous thought, in a move to problematize sovereignty both as a state function and as a dispersed apparatus of biopower. In a 1976 lecture at the Collège de France, Foucault described the theoretical shift he believed necessary for grappling with the function of power in modern society: “Rather than deriving powers from sovereignty, we should be extracting operators of domination from relations of power” (“*Society Must Be Defended*” 45). To do so entails moving from a notion of power as the force wielded by a sovereign individual, to an examination of power’s heterogeneous presence in modern bodies and institutions. As other biopolitical thinkers such as Agamben have argued however, the analysis of life and power in modernity might depend precisely upon continuing examination of sovereignty, but not in the form of a monarchic figure.

Agamben, introducing his notion of “bare life,”⁴² argues that the presence of bare life “in the political realm constitutes the original—if concealed—nucleus of sovereign power. *It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power.* In this sense, biopolitics is at least as old as the sovereign exception” (*Homo Sacer* 6). Sovereignty, from an Agambenian perspective, is perpetuated into the present day as the political move of instituting divisions between valued populations and disposable ones. Those living in groups that are privileged by state power and politics take on an aspect of sovereignty themselves, by belonging to a body whose preservation is referred to as a rationale for marginalizing other groups. It is not hard to see how, for example, whiteness became a valued population trait, and that in turn western politics shaped itself around the preservation of this

⁴² Agamben glosses the term as “the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*” (*Homo Sacer* 8).

supposedly coherent group. And so the “biological,” population-based trait of whiteness takes on a deciding role as to what kind of bodies will be allotted full legal participation and presence, and what kind of (nonwhite) bodies will be cast aside. “The ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die,” as Achille Mbembe writes, reframing Foucault (*Necropolitics* 66). This sovereignty consists in maintaining the life of dominant populations via protective legislation and the negligence and eradication of other forms of life perceived to threaten those populations.

In its sweeping examination of the political and how it produces killable life, biopolitical thought in the vein of Agamben’s tends to elide the specific ways in which bodies are differentiated beyond and within the category of bare life, as critics like Alexander Weheliye have pointed out. In fact, death itself has proven fruitful ground for biopolitical accounts of racism and imperialism that counter and develop Agamben’s thought, as the means by which death is produced and the groups it is most insistently cast upon—African Americans and colonized peoples, for instance—symptomize the uneven workings of sovereignty and biopower.⁴³ Ewa Płonowska Ziarek notes that, although Agamben offers a potent analysis of western dominance, his diagnosis obscures “the question of resistance and the negative differentiation of bare life along racial, ethnic, and gender lines” (“Bare Life on Strike” 92). The over-application of bare life can erase other forms of biopolitical control and histories of biopower.⁴⁴ Such historical erasure functions as a “naturalisation and continuation of settler

⁴³ Along with Mbembe see also JanMohamed.

⁴⁴ Ziarek, “Bare Life on Strike” 102-3; “bare life cannot always be considered as the exclusive referent of the sovereign decision, but it has to be reconceptualized as a more complex, contested terrain in which new forms of domination, dependence, and emancipatory struggles can emerge” (ibid. 103). For other prominent critiques of Agamben, see: the introduction to Weheliye’s *Habeas Viscus* (1-16); Žižek (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 95), who questions the Agambenian reduction of biopower to an expression of the concentration camp, which for Agamben usually means the Nazi death camps; Morgensen (69-71), for further criticism of the deployment of the camp from the perspective of settler colonial studies. There are many other such critiques, which do not I think together amount to a rejection of Agamben, but rather urge caution and local attention in applying his framework.

colonialism within Agamben's theoretical apparatus and the horizons of critical theory" (Morgensen 70), reinscribing dominance by what it leaves out. For Agamben, biopolitics becomes inextricable from bare life, but it is not necessary to follow him this far to appreciate his point about sovereignty as an essential development of Foucault: sovereignty does not disappear when there is no longer a king to embody it. Rather, sovereignty continues to function through the production of exceptions, regulating bodies unevenly by admitting some to political power and setting others aside. In my adaptation of this approach here, (white, straight) men are admitted to the dominating body of Man and allotted sovereign power to decide upon how the bodies of women are to be dispensed with.

Derrida, summarizing his vision of a dispersed sovereignty through readings of *Robinson Crusoe*, writes, "That's sovereignty, that's solitary and exceptional sovereignty: slave, animal, and no woman" (*Beast and the Sovereign* 55).⁴⁵ This is a sovereignty that exceeds both classical western notions⁴⁶ and the Agambenian one, by highlighting a cluster of sovereign distinctions by which social and legal power operate, rather than naming a singular sovereign figure or construing a monolithic subject of power. Modern biopower and dominance are created in the political privileging of bodies excepted from the contaminating biology of the animal, the woman, and the slave. Derrida remarks upon Crusoe's apparent lack of concern with the absence of women on his island: "This happy man never thinks...of the fact that there are women in the world...A little as though there were some secret contract between sovereign euphoria, paradisiacal euphoria, and the absence of women" (ibid. 54). Derrida's point is not unlike Luce Irigaray's analysis in her essay "Women on the Market," in which Irigaray demonstrates that a

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the divergence in Agamben and Derrida's thought along the lines of sovereignty and its resistance, see Mansfield, esp. 361-2, 367-8.

⁴⁶ E.g. Hobbes 114.

patriarchal socio-political structure is one “of exchanges among men,” with women present merely as transferrable commodities that facilitate these relations (171). Women, thought in this way, attain value purely as objects of a market economy, the texture of their bodies and lives disappearing into an apparently more meaningful exchange between men, a “secret contract” to which they are subject but not admitted. This sovereignty of Man coalesces into the masculinized body of the state, with all of the privileges men receive therein. The right to the law, to the citizen’s full access to socio-political power and life, is the provenance of Man.

Sovereignty continues to function through the state in submerged strategies of privilege as well as direct mechanisms of dominance, working to care for the populations it values while killing, ignoring, or disenfranchising those it does not. Any response to the dispersed mechanisms of biopolitical sovereignty must account for longstanding responses to sovereignty writ large, like those carried out by indigenous feminist scholars such as Andrea Smith, who describes a key distinction between US state sovereignty and a native feminist sovereignty: “Whereas nation-states are governed through domination and coercion, indigenous sovereignty and nationhood are predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility” (“American Studies without America” 312). Biopolitical theory often overlooks the fact that *place* remains a contested ground of sovereignty *within* sovereign states, and that the genocidal premises of modern power are hardly confined to the biopolitical touchstone of Nazism, but were practiced relentlessly upon indigenous peoples in the very founding of the western state (ibid. 311). Historical and ongoing dispossession thwarts an alternative, indigenous sovereignty capable of reframing relationships between forms of life—race, gender, species, and more—formations that biopolitical analysis of sovereignty is predicated upon identifying, but that it frequently misses. “What is at the heart of the struggle for native sovereignty is control over land and resources”

(Andrea Smith, “Native American Feminism” 128). Such struggles against and historicized accounts of settler colonialism are no simple supplement to biopolitical theory as it is applied by its most recognized European purveyors—these accounts force a thorough reconsideration of both the (insufficient) histories and (overemphasized) presents of biopolitics as it has been understood (Morgensen).

Not land alone is in question in the indigenous problematic of sovereignty, however, but bodies as well (Simpson 20); together the two ground a response to settler patriarchal violence that indigenous feminism shares with Black feminism (Murdock 199). But feminist concerns with indigenous sovereignty are by no means restricted to North America. Adelle Sefton-Rowston, for instance, has theorized their conceptualization by Australian first-nation people, for whom “sovereignty is a fight to strengthen Indigenous psychologies in order to overcome the ongoing effects of racism and white supremacy that colonization implies” (645). Such a sovereignty always involves maintaining and reclaiming ownership and legislation of land, but as Sefton-Rowston outlines, this struggle with the fallout of colonialism is also a “fight for psychological sovereignty” (645).⁴⁷ The analysis of biopolitical sovereignty that I outline in this chapter—and the indifference that I propose as a counter to this dominance—further textures the heterogeneous operations of masculinized power, while building upon feminist theorizations of bodies and power.

III. Undermining Power, with Bodies

⁴⁷ Cf. 650. Although she does not use the term in the body of her article, in her abstract Sefton-Rowston intriguingly describes as “indifference” the “craziness” of Indigenous characters in Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* and Marie Munkara’s *Every Secret Thing* (644). This craziness is intimately bound up in a particular kind of worlding, through which Sefton-Rowston rewrites “reconciliation” as “not a moving of Indigenous people toward mainstream white culture, but a collective of Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects moving away in search of a new world order” (652).

Before turning to Lawrence, I want to quickly flesh out more fully the ways in which my approach to gendered bodies offers a counter to biopower and to engrained strains of biopolitical thought. Agamben argues that, “Like the concepts of sex and sexuality, the concept of the ‘body’ too is always already caught in a deployment of power. The ‘body’ is always already a biopolitical body and bare life, and nothing in it or the economy of its pleasure seems to allow us to find solid ground on which to oppose the demands of sovereign power” (*Homo Sacer* 187).⁴⁸ This is not far from Kyla Schuller’s sense that, so far as they have historically rested on bodily distinctions, “Feminisms necessarily form part of the contours...of biopower” (106). In these terms, the body cannot be the basis of any resistance to sovereignty or biopower because there is no point from which we might access a body that has not already been defined by them in some way. In my estimation, however, “solid ground” is precisely *not* what we might hope to find in our resisting move. Certainly, there is no body that is outside of power; or rather, the moment that we discover this body we find that it has already been infiltrated by power. My position here is quite the opposite to Agamben’s: by pressing power’s insistence of its ubiquity within the body and its multifaceted bodily determinations, we find that power has, in a sense, overplayed itself. It is not some untouched kernel remaining in the body that we should look for, but instead the very overabundance of biopower’s presence in the body, which signals that the so-thoroughly defined object has become quite unknown.

Power, of course, creates restrictions in ways far beyond the physical limits of sovereign states, and feminism operates as both the articulation of spaces of restriction and overdetermination, and the envisioning of alternatives. As Sara Ahmed writes, “feminism comes into being as a critique of, and resistance to, the ways in which the world has already taken

⁴⁸ Cf. Ziarek, “Bare Life on Strike” 93.

shape” (236). We must rethink our bodies and our worlds, and for this we require an entirely new logic.⁴⁹ Feminism orients us to boundaries that bodies encounter in the world, and to fabulative practices of exceeding these boundaries. For Ahmed, the discovery and destabilization of boundaries takes place on largely affective grounds: “It is through the intensification of feeling that bodies and worlds materialize and take shape or that the effect of surface, boundary and fixity is produced” (241). The experience of gender-based boundaries—in violence, discrimination, spatial restriction—is fully real and results in the experience of a definite world. Yet it also posits a beyond to these limits. “[T]o say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and borders is also to suggest,” Ahmed writes, “that what ‘makes’ those borders also unmakes them” (241). That is, the infuriating experience of coming up against arbitrary limits to our lives makes those limits very real, but it also signals where we must direct our frustration to produce meaningful change. For Ahmed, the experience of bounding renders us capable of a feminist practice of *wonder*, of feeling the possibilities of worlds beyond and experiencing the awe of attempting to bring them into being (251). In my view, however, wonder and imagining take us only so far; to truly move past the boundaries instituted by biopower requires becoming utterly indifferent to the limits it makes. Living our bodies, we feel the limits of our world. Wondering, we think past these limits. In indifference we move our bodies past them.

I propose in the readings that follow that literature presents powerful possibilities for generating the wonder that Ahmed describes, and for preparing the move of indifference. In so doing, I look at texts as inscriptions of gender norms that also offer pathways toward envisioning notions of bodies and being that exceed these contingent norms. Sovereign Man is an idealized (white/male/heterosexual) fantasy that is practiced politically as a norm, but “Universal, absolute

⁴⁹ “‘How do we create a world?’ I am arguing that you cannot do it in terms of ‘Man.’ You cannot do it in the logic of the order of consciousness of ‘Man.’” (Wynter 12).

man exists nowhere” (Beauvoir 112). This sovereignty can be undone by beginning with the transgressions of art—not by erasing sex and gender, but by the ongoing practice of recreating the sovereign relationship to gendered bodies.⁵⁰ Butler’s mandate “to articulate the convergence of multiple sexual discourses at the site of ‘identity’ in order to render that category, in whatever form, permanently problematic” remains urgent (*Gender Trouble* 174). Making newly indifferent bodies, through literature, is a feminist tool for problematizing identity and the world.

IV. Wonder and the Uncanny in *The Rainbow*

The gendered encounters of *The Rainbow* give shape to its world—reifying identity, destabilizing it in collaborative productions of self, and again producing gendered territories for its subjects. This process is anticipated early on, in the development of Tom Brangwen’s passion for Lydia. Passing her on the road, Tom ponders a sense of inevitable change that will bring about a reformation of everything that structures his life and being: “It was coming, he knew, his fate. The world was submitting to its transformation” (24-5). As his relationship with Lydia evolves, Tom experiences the changes he anticipated in his world and his self; “He submitted to that which was happening to him, letting go his will, suffering the loss of himself, dormant always on the brink of ecstasy, like a creature evolving to a new birth” (30). This process of ongoing rebirth is not restricted to Tom alone, as Lydia too “would have to begin again, to find a new being, a new form” (31). There is profound change effected in both Tom and Lydia, as they become together and their beings are de- and re-constituted in the process of rebuilding the world

⁵⁰ As Butler writes in her discussion of Monique Wittig (*Gender Trouble*, e.g. 161), we cannot simply do away with sex in pursuing transcendent identities. I align myself here more closely with Butler than Repo, who in the closing pages of *The Biopolitics of Gender* favors “a wide-reaching feminist critique of the sexual politics of capitalist biopolitical modernity...without the discourse of gender” (177). It is also worth bearing in mind in this context the role played by ungendering in the objectification and dehumanization of Black bodies; see Weheliye 96-7.

together. This collaborative experience is akin for each character to Deleuze and Guattari's description of the encounter with the other: "There is, at some moment, a calm and restful world. Suddenly a frightened face looms up that looks at something out of the field. The other person appears here as neither subject nor object but as something that is very different: a possible world, the possibility of a frightening world" (*What Is Philosophy?* 17). Tom and Lydia appear to one another as such possibilities, as unknown potentialities that disrupt the sphere of the known in the making of something terrifying and new.

There is an affective aspect here, especially involving the remaking of the embodied self and the scope of the possible. Without flattening the diversity of affect, we might consider the sense of foreboding at the coming of a new world alongside the wonder that Ahmed posits. For Ahmed, wonder involves "engendering a sense of surprise about how it is that the world has come to take the shape that it has" (250). This is what takes place for Tom and Lydia, who are becoming acquainted with the notion that their personal worlds are not necessary, but contingent. Such a change also occurs in Anna, Lydia's daughter, in the evolution of her relationship with Tom that follows his marriage to Lydia. When Lydia is isolated during the culmination of her pregnancy with Tom's child, Tom brings Anna—furious at being unable to see her mother—to help him feed the cows in an effort to distract her. As they enter the barn, the pair step into "another world": "The child, all wonder, watched what he did. A new being was created in her for the new conditions. Sometimes, a little spasm, eddying from the bygone storm of sobbing, shook her small body" (64). Anna's wonder, like that of her mother and of Tom, is the apprehension of an uncertainty arriving to alter the sedimented shapes of their lives, a wonder that is sublime in its mixture with terror.

As Tom and Anna enter the barn together, the echoing spasms of Anna's terror come to signify not only her residual frustration, but also her trembling at the close confrontation with the other in her father, the cows, and this new world. As Anna calms, her terror at her mother's condition melds with her wonder at the cows, who are physically present and yet hidden, secretive. Tom "went along a dimly-lit passage behind the mangers, where the horns of the cows pricked out of the obscurity....There was a noise of chains running, as the cows lifted or dropped their heads sharply; then a contented, soothing sound, a long snuffing as the beast ate in silence" (64). Tom feeds the cows as Anna watches: "The two sat very quiet. His mind, in a sort of trance, seemed to become more and more vague. He held the child close to him. A quivering little shudder, re-echoing from her sobbing, went down her limbs" (65). Anna and Tom become extremely close in this moment, while remaining, as with the cows, quite mysterious to one another. And Anna continues to tremble at both the terror she has undergone—her confrontation with the unknown and hidden condition of her mother which will bring a new life to the world—and at the wonder of the unknown life before her in Tom and the cows. In her trembling, Anna wonders at the secret life around and within her and its unpredictable becoming, a wonder that is embodied in her repeated tremors. Formations of sovereignty and its hierarchies—father, daughter, beast—do not dissipate in this encounter between trembling bodies, but they do become confused in an embodied collaboration that produces a new, felt world for each.

Just as Anna quakes at her trauma and at an "anticipated but unpredictable" future (Derrida, *Gift of Death* 55), Tom is disturbed by his interactions with Lydia. This concern also manifests in the presence of an animality, a species confusion that the narration classifies via gendered difference. Once Anna is asleep, and Tom has brought her back to the house and to bed, he returns to Lydia. As he does so he hears "the sound of the owls – the moaning of the

woman. What an uncanny sound! It was not human – at least to a man” (66). From Tom’s masculine perspective, Lydia is here resolutely nonhuman; but as the narration insists, she is not therefore entirely repellant: “She was beautiful to him – but it was not human. He had a dread of her as she lay there. What had she to do with him? She was other than himself” (66). When Lydia looks upon Tom in this moment, the narration supposes that “She did not know him as himself. But she knew him as the man” (66). In this exchange of gazes, Lawrence’s narrative reduces both to differently privileged gendered essences; Tom becomes “the man”—not himself, but Man—Lydia becomes nonhuman woman. Lydia is in this exchange ejected from sovereignty. She is reconfigured into a prostrate, beautiful object-animal, lying abject and other before Man. The strategy of dehumanization is, of course, a core mechanism of sovereign expulsion, but here it also muddies sovereignty, as Tom is unable to comfortably place animals and an animalized woman at a safe remove from himself. This discomfort continues to haunt the characters of the novel, as it will later haunt Ursula in an experience with a group of horses that intervene to sunder her from claims of a sovereignty staked to the humanity of Man (Doherty).

As Lawrence’s language suggests, there are elements of the uncanny and of Kristevan abjection at play in the gendered relationship between Tom and Lydia. The relationship between psychoanalytic thought and Lawrence’s work has a long and well-documented history, including in Lawrence’s own writing⁵¹ and in arguments surrounding Lawrence’s adaptation of Freud’s thought⁵² and comparative readings of the two.⁵³ Freud’s understanding of the uncanny figures into this conversation as well (Marks). My concern, however, is with what possibilities of reading self and gender might arise from considering the novel as an intersection between

⁵¹ See for instance his *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious*.

⁵² E.g. Kessler 473-4.

⁵³ E.g. Dervin.

Lawrence and psychoanalysis. The fears that Tom conveys here certainly resonate with the Freudian uncanny, with that “anxiety” for which “there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*” (Freud 604). Tom’s confusion of the origin of the sound—woman or owl?—his assertion of his own masculinity as distancing device from the disquieting noise, and his uncertainty about whether Lydia is alive—“His heart leapt, fearing she was dead. Yet he knew perfectly well she was not” (66)—all intersect with various notions of the uncanny discussed by Freud.⁵⁴ Tom’s assertion that Lydia’s sound is inhuman “to a man” acts particularly as gendered self-reassurance, a reminder Tom makes to himself that he is a man and human.

This is a sovereign attempt at repressing the incursion of the other that is characteristic of the uncanny—and of the “more violent” rewriting of the uncanny as abjection (Kristeva 5)—an incursion that threatens to dissolve the sovereign boundaries of Tom’s self. To read the Freudian uncanny here rather literally, Tom recalls in this moment that he has not been castrated, recalling this because he has been confronted by an inhuman other in Lydia that threatens to unman him by suggesting a repressed similarity. For Tom to remain a man/Man, he must categorically set himself off from Lydia, a project with which the narration assists by depicting Lydia as obliging Tom, looking at him “female to male” (66). The uncanny persists however, as the narrative means by which Tom is positioned as a stand-in for Man also creates in Tom a doubled figure of the male.⁵⁵ In becoming “the man,” rather than (other than) himself, Tom’s body becomes the site of transcendent Man, a transcendence anxiously repressed for the very fact that this universal

⁵⁴ A *heimlich* animal is one that is “tame, companionable to man,” while Lydia as owl-woman is unknown and other (Freud 2017, 594). On 597 Freud discusses Ernst Jentsch’s concept of the uncanny, one aspect of which is ambiguity regarding whether another is living or dead.

⁵⁵ Cf. Freud 601.

exceeds and therefore cannot become present in the body, a recollection that does succeed, paradoxically, in un-manning Tom.

Tom insists here repeatedly—perhaps desperately—that Lydia is woman, nonhuman, other, while he is male, and therefore human and selfsame. His solution to the resurgence of the repressed difference of the masculine ideal is an attempted fusion of that transcendence with his own body, an attempt that is neither pleasant nor successful: “A great, scalding peace went over him, burning his heart and his entrails, passing off into the infinite” (66). A unifying, self-identifying move of this kind, as Irigaray reminds us, is characteristic of the socio-political operation of masculinity itself. Regarding the discourse of sexed difference that has arisen since Freud, Irigaray queries, “isn’t this syntax always...a means of masculine self-affection, or masculine self-production or re-production, or self-generation or self-representation—himself as the self-same, as the only standard of sameness?” (132). This assertion of self-sameness is a masculine move that is also the excepting move of sovereignty, by which sovereignty attempts to distinguish itself by and from what it is not.⁵⁶ Derrida describes this as *ipseity*, the “autopositioning of sovereignty...that includes within itself...the androcentric positioning of power in the master or head of the household, the sovereign mastery” (*Rogues* 142). Androcentric dominance sovereignly asserts itself by its removal from the contaminating other. Biopolitically, sovereignty excepts itself from nonhuman life, which is in this passage of Lawrence framed as female life.

In the culmination of his anxiety, both at Lydia’s condition and at his confrontation with his own uncanny masculinity, which challenges the self-sameness at the heart of his androcentric sovereignty, Tom experiences the wonder of a new world. Leaving Lydia’s bedside, Tom steps

⁵⁶ This is somewhat of an oversimplification. The sovereign exclusion is also the way in which sovereignty marks those it dominates, making them paradoxically constitutive to sovereignty.

downstairs and outside into the rain, becoming powerfully affected by a confrontation with life and the world: “The swift, unseen threshing of the night upon him silenced him and he was overcome. He turned away indoors, humbly. There was the infinite world, eternal, unchanging, as well as the world of life” (66). Unable to reconcile the transcendental within his own body, Tom displaces the uncanny doubling he underwent onto the world itself. The world becomes uncanny in this moment; twinned into “the infinite world” and “the world of life,” the world itself is here disturbed. Lacking self-identity yet nominally undifferentiated, the world is tangible and alive, yet unattainable, void, lifeless, capable of swallowing Tom up. His wonder is mixed with fright, precipitated by his encounter with Lydia’s face as the face of the other. But the possibility that Tom encounters here, which the narrative attempts to frame as a dualism, is *not* the recognition that the world simply has two aspects, but the very undecidability of the world itself: the world never accedes to a clean division by which it becomes knowable. “[T]here is no world, not even a world, not even one and the same world, no world that is one: *the* world, *a* world, a world that is *one*, is what there is not” (Derrida, *Beast & the Sovereign* 266). Tom’s epiphany is the experience of the very nonipseity of the world and of sovereign Man, who has lost control of his world.

The lack of knowability that comes to define the world⁵⁷ is not a basis for retreat, but the very ground upon which new possibilities—of politics, being, world—might be created. I read Tom’s epiphany here as a failed attempt to re-decide upon the form of the world as dualistic, rather than singular. The new grounds that might emerge in “the world of life” he identifies are unstable. By doubling the world as the transcendental world and the actually lived world,

⁵⁷ Cf. Derrida, *Beast & the Sovereign* 176. This is not the kind of lack that might be compensated for and completed, but an absent origin that is constitutive of the world itself. Cf. Nancy, *Creation of the World* 69: “the world is lacking nothing, because the being of the world is the thing permeated by the nothing.”

Lawrence's narration asserts an intersection but ultimate incommensurability between both. The world, then, continues to be at once both the space-time in which we live, and its ongoing, undetermined and undeterminable possibilities. It is therefore necessary, as Jean-Luc Nancy has urged "*To create the world*" (*Creation of the World* 54), to "struggle precisely in the name of the fact that this *world* is coming out of nothing, that there is nothing before it and that it is without models, without principle and without given end, and that it is precisely *what* forms the justice and the meaning of a world" (55). Tom's attempt at grappling with a new aspect of the world as he confronts unknowable life that does not fit the world he knows, sets the stage for a struggle between actually-existing life and the infinite qualities that become attached to it by politics.

To attempt re-thinking and re-making the boundaries of the world means reconsidering who makes the world, and why. Tom's epiphany offers a troubling encounter with "the world of life," a biopolitical cognizance of life as a regulative site of the world, which forces an interrogation of Tom's sovereign patriarchal position, his responsibility to the (female) other, and the undecidability that grounds him as male and human. The uncertainty that Tom experiences figures gendered relationships throughout the novel, pointing to an instability of the world by which life exceeds its categorization in gender, urging the formation of new worlds and sovereignties by becoming indifferent to the world of sexist biopower that sovereign Man sets up. Sovereignty is inscribed upon our bodies and the worlds we traverse them with; to feel the body grasp at a world with new limits is to parry the attacks made upon bodies by biopower.

V. *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Colonial Worlding

If the female other arises as a challenge to the integrity of sovereign Man in Lawrence's modernism, corroding its unity and universal dominance, this process is refracted in the colonial

encounter, as the masculine European sovereign becomes the sovereign settler. The colonizer construes nativity for themselves, and with it, sole claim to sovereignty (Sharma). The process of colonial settling itself, as Alan Lawson has pointed out, is fraught with uncanny, affective peril, in which the settled is set aside in order to render the settler the “authentic” inhabitant of the land (1212). In this setting-aside, however, the settled insistently, uncannily returns as the basis of the settler’s identity (ibid. 1221). In this section, I read the uncanny sovereign relationship in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a world-making process that uniquely affects gendered bodies. Bodies are sites for locating and contesting regulatory biopolitical strategies, strategies that turn on forms of othering to reduce life to nonhuman control groups. As these bodies experience the limits of their gendered worlds, they learn indifference to those limits.

Gayatri Spivak, working with reference to Rhys’ novel, calls upon the necessity of remembering the fact of imperialism as constitutive of English identity, and of the ways Englishness has represented itself to itself in literature:

If these ‘facts’ were remembered...we would produce a narrative, in literary history, of the ‘worlding’ of what is now called ‘the Third World.’ To consider the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized...fosters the emergence of ‘the Third World’ as a signifier that allows us to forget that ‘worlding.’ (“Three Women’s Texts” 243)

Wide Sargasso Sea, in Spivak’s analysis, is capable of bringing these facts to the forefront of western memory, particularly as a rewriting of *Jane Eyre*.⁵⁸ In Spivak’s discussion, Charlotte

⁵⁸ Framing her analysis of Rhys, Brontë, and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Spivak states that “I read *Wide Sargasso Sea* as *Jane Eyre*’s reinscription and *Frankenstein* as an analysis—even a deconstruction—of a ‘worlding’ such as *Jane Eyre*’s” (“Three Women’s Texts” 244).

Brontë's novel emblemizes the process by which the English subject constructed itself by overcoding the native. In doing so, the novel elides both imperialism as a repressive force, and a native people's capacity to change and produce⁵⁹—to world their own world.

The colonial context of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a catalyst for my heterogeneous conceptualization of sovereignty. Rhys' novel enacts an unstable sovereign hierarchy whereby the local Caribbean individual—like Antoinette's friend Tia or her nurse Christophine—are partially dominated by the resident creole population, who in turn are dominated by western white men. Lugones has framed Man's hierarchical position by arguing that "The European, bourgeois, colonial, modern man became a subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason" (743). In Weheliye's terms, Man, as the category of the dominant sovereign human subject, is constructed through a plurality of exceptions and oppressions: "In the context of the secular human, black subjects, along with indigenous populations, the colonized, the insane, the poor, the disabled, and so on serve as limit cases by which Man can demarcate himself as the universal human" (24). Similarly, Sheri-Marie Harrison contends that in Rhys' novel "the successful and unsuccessful interactions between Antoinette and Tia...work together to provide a useful context for imagining sovereignty within the terms of dissensus" (112). Sovereignty is never a simple distinction. Adding women to Weheliye's list, I consider below how Antoinette, in her embodied position between contending sovereignties and semi-sovereignties, helps elucidate the undecidability of sovereignty, and how the strategies of exception by which sovereignty enacts itself also unwittingly serve to make the excluded other a constitutive component of sovereignty, thereby opening a place for the disruption of sovereign order. This disruption, one of dissensus

⁵⁹ I.e. "considering the 'native' as object for enthusiastic information-retrieval and thus denying its own 'worlding'" (Spivak, "Three Women's Texts" 245).

and indifference, parallels the “authentic power coming from a generated consensus and a respect for dissent” that Leanne Betasamosake Simpson identifies in indigenous deployments of sovereignty (19). Feminist indifference opens the way to valuing and fostering an interplay between dissent and consensus, against the consensus that sovereign biopower inscribes upon life and its spaces.

Much has been made of the various uncanny mirrorings and repetitions in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, not least of which being the novel as a distorted mirroring of Brontë’s work. Spivak, Harrison, and Lee Erwin are among critics to focus on a particular uncanny moment within the novel, in which a young Antoinette and Tia face one another as Antoinette and her family flee the burning ruins of Coulibri, Antoinette’s childhood home. As Antoinette runs to join Tia, Tia throws a rock at her: “We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass” (Rhys 45). Per Erwin’s reading, in this mirroring

the image splits into its own reversal infinitely, as the identity Antoinette claims is also simultaneously the recognition of an unbridgeable difference. That is, even as she claims to be seeing ‘herself,’ she is simultaneously seeing the other, that which only defines the self by its separation from it, in this case literally by means of a cut. (144-5)⁶⁰

There is also a suggestion in this scene of abjection, in the violent resurgence of racial difference between the two girls, which Antoinette attempts to repress as she approaches Tina: “We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her” (Rhys 45). Antoinette continues to try to refuse this difference

⁶⁰ Nancy Leigh, who also analyzes this passage, writes that “In a sense, Tia is Antoinette’s black self, her double and her mirror” (274). This doubling, however, is finally not a statement of identity but of difference: “Antoinette cannot be like Tia, no matter how much she identifies with her” (275).

even after she has been hit by the stone, ignoring the distinctions between the two of them, the difference between blood and tears.

In fact, blood is the very site of the “biological” dissimilarity between (white) Antoinette and (Black) Tia—the biopolitical evidence for a racial distinction. Antoinette herself evokes this earlier in the novel when she hurls a racial epithet at Tia (24). In misrecognizing herself in Tia, Antoinette experiences her own non-ipseity and the ineradicable presence of the other within herself, a truly uncanny perception.⁶¹ Like Tom, she experiences a cutting-off from the other to whom she felt herself close, but this cutting, literally marked here upon her body, does not assist with Antoinette’s self-definition. Quite the opposite: in the rejection of her desire to “live with Tia and...be like her,” Antoinette is made to feel the racial difference between them. She cannot “live with” Tia, because she is of a different order of raced and gendered life. Into this break intrudes Antoinette’s sovereignty, which is here racial rather than gendered. But her sovereign position is quite uncertain—as Tia has told Antoinette earlier, Antoinette’s family no longer even qualifies as “Real white people” (24). The experience of projecting the self upon the other, but then of recognizing the other in their unassimilable alterity, forces recognition of alterity in ourselves and of our responsibility to others (Derrida, *Gift of Death* 69). “Tia’s racial subjectivity engenders that of the Other, and in seeing herself as Tia, Antoinette begins to see herself as Other” (Harrison 120). For Nancy, becoming open to our uncertain responsibility is precisely how a world is created, by welcoming the radically unknown (*Creation of the World* 51).⁶² The

⁶¹ Later in the novel, Antoinette directly confronts her own anxieties about racial ipseity and identity after hearing her servant Amélie singing about her: “It was a song about a white cockroach,” Antoinette tells her husband, “That’s me. That’s what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I’ve heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all” (102).

⁶² Responding to Nancy, Henk Oosterling remarks that it is a “differential spacing for an encounter with the other—a just-between-us—from which worlds are created by sharing in the same performative modality as sovereignty and the self” (94-5).

supposedly sovereign self has no innately stable ground, but is constantly recreated in encounters between others and our own uncanny otherness.

Haraway insists upon the need for feminist sympoiesis or “world making”: for engaging with the entanglements of self and other that take the shape of our muddled, modern bodies (*Staying with the Trouble* 147). Here “the other” is not some vague philosophical concept but a constellation of real bodies and lives. In its theoretical preoccupation with otherness, deconstruction often loses sight of how difference is thoroughly lived. This necessitates a feminist response that details exactly how in its heterogeneity—of race, of gender—biopower unevenly rules different populations.⁶³ When Antoinette is cut by Tia, she physically encounters this sovereign hierarchy: her race precludes her from identifying with Tia, and she is relegated to a privileged group of whites despite the experience of gendered oppression that the two women share.

Life is gendered and racialized under this Caribbean biopolitics as a strategy of interceding in intersectional solidarity, but this segmentation can only be a source of anxiety, rather than stability, when the uncertainty of race and gender becomes apparent. A feminist response to these unsustainable hierarchies must involve forging tangible, textured relationships that value uncertainty. At the same time, one cannot ignore the reality of lived identities that cause populations to be differently subjected to biopower. As Haraway puts it, “Like all offspring of colonizing and imperial histories, I—we—have to relearn how to conjugate worlds with partial connections and not universals and particulars” (*Staying with the Trouble* 13). This is

⁶³ Although Derrida’s critical relationship to the body shifts somewhat in his later work, McNay was right to point out in 1991 that in his thought “the body tends to be a metaphorization of the more general philosophical problem of difference,” and this criticism continues to be a serious one for deconstructionist thought (128). Derrida’s later meditations on hospitality do prompt analysis more explicitly concerned with real bodies and with alterity as lived and historical difference, but these still do not quite escape McNay’s critique (and my own); see for example Derrida’s *Of Hospitality* (with Anne Dufourmantelle), delivered as lectures in 1996 but not published in English until 2000.

a forging of connections between bodies that exceed Man's—and the state's—narrow definition of the human and of valuable life, and it is not dissimilar from the projects of reconfiguring sovereignty put forth by indigenous feminism. As Andrea Smith writes, there is a sovereign responsibility for fostering “interrelatedness” that extends to the land and its nonhuman inhabitants (“Native American Feminism” 129).⁶⁴ We might recover a different sovereignty, that is, if sovereignty is to take the form of a communal responsibility for muddling hierarchies between races, genders, human and nonhuman, rather than trying to shore them up.

Spivak is concerned with making possible worlds attuned to the actual life of the other and its imperialist appropriation. Imperialism acts upon different bodies, as different others, in different ways. Antoinette, as a white creole woman, is used by the imperialism of her husband and of *Jane Eyre* in ways that Christophine cannot be. Christophine, Spivak writes:

cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native. No perspective *critical* of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self. (“Three Women’s Texts” 253)

Imperialism, and the sovereign imperialist conquering subject, are grounded in the worlding of the other as always fully known and controlled. Spivak and Haraway offer a corrective to deconstructionist thinking, making present the heterogeneity and incommensurability of the other in both its unknown aspect and its distinct historical position within imperialism’s self-aggrandizement. Rhys’ novel portrays lives and bodies at play in this exchange, in the

⁶⁴ Cf. D’Arcangelis 131, 135.

unassimilable difference of Christophine's autochthony—her ways of knowing and being that exceed imperialist possibilities (Spivak, "Three Women's Texts" 253)—and in Antoinette's eventual imprisonment.

Antoinette's experience of leaving Coulibri, the fiery backdrop of which is mirrored in the novel's closing, suggests a number of other "partial connections." The final pages of *Wide Sargasso Sea* find Antoinette dreaming, an uncanny dream of her parrot Coco returning as herself, setting fire to the English house in which she is now caged. "I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est là? Qui est là?* and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha!" (189). Antoinette envisions herself upon the battlements, Tia and the pool at Coulibri below her, and jumps, waking from her dream. Then she lets herself out of her cage and departs with a candle, seemingly to fulfill her vision. In Spivak's reading, at this point Antoinette "must play out her role, act out the transformation of her 'self' into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction" ("Three Women's Texts" 251). For Spivak, this is the imperialist literary worlding of Antoinette, the culmination of her overdetermination as Bertha, madwoman. In my reading, however, this fiery ending is also a worlding of Antoinette's own making, a violent act through which she reframes imperialism and its outcomes by asserting its contingency: the house of imperialism can be burned. This suicidal conflagration is not a liberation, but an act of self-destructive resistance to the limits set on Antoinette's body, as she reclaims those limits. In this way Antoinette denies the sovereignty of Man its central tenet, the capacity to decide upon the death of the other.

VI. Becoming Indifferent

In an overview of the mirror in Rhys' work, Nancy Leigh argues that "Through her use of the mirror, both literal and symbolic (language), [Rhys] shows how her central characters come to define themselves in relation to men and to accept men's perceptions of them as more accurate than their own" (271). In the novel's final passage, among the flames in which Tia returns as that uncanny, imagined mirror, there is certainly "an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer" (Spivak, "Three Women's Texts" 251). But there is also a sacrificial resistance to the sovereign masculine power that called Antoinette Bertha and placed her in a cage in England. "Though framed as an act of madness, burning down her husband's house symbolizes an attack on patriarchy and the destruction of the literary conventions that bolster its subordinating power" (Harrison 119). Antoinette's final act, only dreamed and foreshadowed, turns against the sovereignties of imperialist Man from within the semi-sovereign position of the creole woman. Thinking with Sefton-Rowston, Antoinette's indifference to the seemingly ironclad masculine power that has caged her might indeed look a great deal like madness. This may seem a paltry resistance; destruction and suicide in the face of no other options. Yet if biopower "consists in making live and letting die" (Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*" 247), then reclaiming the capacity to decide upon her own death and to refuse to be made to live in captivity can hardly be a meaningless act.

The emphasis on mirroring in *Wide Sargasso Sea* places the novel firmly within a feminist discourse of reflection.⁶⁵ The curtailed possibility for women to signify outside of the patriarchal structure in Irigaray's formulation, and their reduction to the leftovers of masculinist

⁶⁵ See in particular Irigaray 30. Virginia Woolf, whom Hollander builds her argument upon, is also an essential contributor to this line of thought; see her frequently-cited passage on mirroring in *A Room of One's Own* (35-6), but we also might consider questions of mirroring, difference, and the self in her lesser-known work, such as *Flush* (47-8, 135).

power—or the sovereignty of Man—also resonate with imperialist overdetermination. The semi-sovereign white female subject, who is not subaltern but can signify only within and to the benefit of pre-existing power structures, is relegated to a position of limited agency, especially legally. This is what Antoinette describes when she speaks to Christophine of her marriage: “‘I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him.’ . . . ‘That is English law’” (110). This is a legal womanhood that is less than human. Drawing on Irigaray and Hortense Spillers, Weheliye writes that “the different groups excluded from the category of proper humanity encounter only a scopic echo of their deviance from—and therefore reinscribe—the superiority of western Man, reflecting their own value as ontological lack and western Man’s value as properly human” (43).⁶⁶ Woman, excluded from the properly human territory of Man—unevenly so as white woman, creole woman, Black woman—is also thereby essential to Man, a reflection and confirmation of his sovereign selfhood. There is a gendered “exception,” in Agamben’s terms—a “zone of indistinction” (*State of Exception* 26)—whereby women are both excluded and, as the excluded body by which Man defines itself, included.⁶⁷

What living resistance is possible? What alternatives to the sovereignty of Man are opened by Lawrence and Rhys? Together they assert a globalizing, but contingent, androcentric sovereignty, a western masculine subject that places itself in a position of dominance through biopolitical taxonomy. But asserting contingency alone does not produce equity, nor can a retreat to one-size-fits-all theorizing. Rather than formulating resistance through existing discourses or articulating resistance *for* the other—as Spivak pointed out in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”—we might instead attempt a kind of “systematic unlearning” (91). Such a project would involve

⁶⁶ Cf. Spillers 67.

⁶⁷ Compare Irigaray 88: women’s “exclusion is *internal* to an order from which nothing escapes: the order of (man’s) discourse.”

willfully forgetting the limits we know. What is needed is a kind of thinking that ignores the logic of dominance and makes its own way, without having in mind a utopic goal. Contingency is the beginning of this, the recognition that laws, oppression, patriarchal thinking are not eternal, but it is not the end. The end—which is truly an end only to the sexist and racist world that we’ve become acquainted with—is in actively unlearning what we now know to be contingent.

In my estimation, such an unlearning is perfectly—and more radically—described by Irigaray as *indifference*: “Indifferent one, keep still. When you stir, you disturb their order. You upset everything. You break the circle of their habits, the circularity of their exchanges, their knowledge, their desire. Their world” (207). Here the injunction to “keep still” clearly must be transgressed, and what happens when one is active in their indifference? Far from some kind of passive ignorance, this is an indifference that is active and purposefully transgressive; it is disturbing, upsetting, stirring. Whose habits are ruined by indifference, whose exchanges have remained circular, whose knowledge and desire have come together to form a world we all have been forced to live? Who but Man? In the world of Man one cannot live in indifference, but rather must attend incessantly with great attention to the rules and laws that dictate what is acceptable for their genre of humanity. Let us become indifferent to these—not easily, not evenly, but actively, sovereignly, even. Nick Mansfield writes that “If the sovereignty we abhor is to be undone...it will not be undone by opposition, or by hope and patience, but by fuelling the logic of unconditionality within it” (371). Let us be irrational and indifferent, unconditionally unconditional. If the sovereignty of Man is to include unconditional say in the disposal of the lives of its others, let us say, ok, but why not also give those others unconditional say in your lives? We see your logic and render it—illogical.

Becoming indifferent—creating “the possibility of more radical change” (Hollander 92). This is not to suddenly become unaffected by dominance, or merely to will a difference, but to open ourselves to possibilities that are entirely undecided in advance. Let us recover Irigaray’s buried concept, inject it with its full implications for our bodies and our worlds, and rethink indifference as *the* ethical attitude. The kernel of this is present in Tom’s epiphanic wonder, his realization that the world can be different, that the world cannot coincide with some patriarchal fantasy that happily finds its place in his body: an indifference forced upon him by the so-alien life of his wife and the unborn life to come. The possibility of indifference is what Antoinette grasps when she realizes that “England,” the idealized father country with a place for every man and women—is merely a thin veil that one can walk through. A walk into death, perhaps, but a walk that can only be undertaken by stirring oneself to pass the walls one is told they cannot pass, out of living death and into a death that is one’s own. In the nights, when her caretaker falls into a drunken sleep, Antoinette takes the keys to her cage: “Then I open the door and walk into their world. It is, as I always knew, made of cardboard” (Rhys 180). No cardboard world can last. It needs only a push, a step, which can only come when we render ourselves indifferent to the façade and its consequences. This will not be easy nor painless; stirring up trouble never is.

The next chapter continues my project of inscribing the heterogeneity of sovereign dominance by shifting to the domain of race as a mechanism of organizing the modern body. In that chapter, I move through the suffocating racialized space of Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, the doomed transgressions of Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, and the imperial racist bounding of J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The punitive worlds of each of these texts act as protest against the impositions and imperialisms of racism and its formations of space and being. I

center in this way the contingencies of race and racialized sovereignty, contingencies that can be traced through these three novels to the historical and modernizing processes of colonialism, slavery, and racist economic organizations of the US North in the 1920s and 1930s. Biopolitical spatial organizations around race are constitutive of the sovereign body of whiteness, in ongoing and globalized formations of the modern subject. Modernism and postcolonial literature continue to intersect here around the construction of the sovereign body, reasserting the symbiotic relationship between a modernism that recognizes its ongoing concerns and its western locality, and postcolonial thought that finds allies in Black American modernists. With this collaboration in hand, these novels allow for a textured explication of tolerance, justice, and hospitality as biopolitical issues, as the question of raced bodies evokes their relationship to that body that unevenly dominates them: the body politic.

Chapter 3

(Un)Worlding Race: Barbarians and Other Others

Rot! Everything can't be explained by some general biological phrase.

-Nella Larsen 56

Just as gender and species become grounds in modernity for categorical regulations of sovereignty, race too functions as a political mechanism for categorizing bodies. In this chapter I describe some of the ways in which this mechanism operates, through readings of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, and J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Besides further pluralizing my biopolitical approach to sovereignty through an examination of racial othering as a means of sovereign ordering, my readings here increasingly orient this project toward possibilities for an ethical responsibility. In doing so, the primary texts are reread here with a new political relevance as sites for developing more just political practices, through readings that newly engage their mechanisms of life and death. Through these three novels I articulate a trajectory of racialized otherness as an embodied function of biopower: in the uncanny transgressions of racial community (*Passing*), the categorical embodiment of the Black subject caught in a living death (*Native Son*), and the communal and individual response to the perceived threat of the other to sovereign imperial life (*Waiting for the Barbarians*). This is a branching trajectory of biopower's relation to the other, in its vacillation between and transcendence of the sanctity of the embodied subject, the imagined imperviousness of the racial community, and the dominance of the imperial life-world. I argue here that the only possible

ethical response to the confrontation with the other—a confrontation, as these texts demonstrate, constantly being enacted in ourselves, our social bodies, our ways of knowing, and our scaffoldings of power—is a hospitality that exceeds all law. Read comparatively, Larsen, Wright, and Coetzee proffer a world to come that exceeds biopolitical structures of sovereignty and racial dominance; in describing the contingent conditions by which the racialized other is policed and excluded from the white bodies capable of living a sovereign power, these novels strategize the overcoming and undermining of that power. This reading makes possible a shift in power and agency by addressing these aesthetic projects as sites of a sovereign response capable of making bodies the sites of an active justice.

I. Racial Nonipseity and Enslaved Life: *Passing*

In the previous chapter, I detailed the uncanny qualities of Man as sovereign formation of gender—the ways in which Man, as an imaginary, transcendent site of power, is absent from the masculinized bodies supposed to form its immanent instances. Men, in this way, are never equal to the category that supposedly justifies their gendered dominance. As such, Man is a sovereign formation characterized by nonipseity: it can never be equal to itself, but is always in pursuit of the qualities that are purportedly constitutive of it. The specter of its own nonidentity with itself is always returning to haunt Man in the bodies of others—women, beasts, etc.—that remind Man of that which he has excluded to become what he is, and that this very exclusion makes of the excluded a constitutive component of Man.⁶⁸ I begin here with *Passing*, in order to highlight the

⁶⁸ I draw in this line of thought, and in my discussion of the specter or revenant throughout, on Derrida's work on this subject. As Anne Dufourmantelle writes, "To the pacified reason of Kant, Derrida opposes the primary haunting of a subject prevented by alterity from closing itself off in its peacefulness" (*Of Hospitality* 4). Or, as Derrida clarifies in *Specters of Marx*, the specter is distinguished by "the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of someone as someone other. And of someone other that we will not hasten to determine as self, subject, person, consciousness, spirit, and so forth" (6).

ways in which an analogous operation takes place in the sovereign body as white body. Next I move to *Native Son*, centering the sovereign machinery of death that the law forces upon the Black subject. In reading these texts, I contend that the white body in American modernity, in relation to the Black body, has transitioned from the full, pseudo-monarchic legal sovereignty of the master over the slave, to the de jure sovereignty of bodies allotted a privileged legal sphere under Jim Crow, and into the ongoing de facto sovereign dominance perpetuated by economic segregation, uneven imprisonment, disenfranchisement, police brutality, and all of the ongoing markers of racial injustice that are inextricable from daily life in the West. In the final section of the chapter, I work through *Waiting for the Barbarians* in order to engage racialization as a process of barbarization. Here the history of apartheid appears as a transnational comparative point for Jim Crow and US racism. From its institution in 1948 until its abolishment in the 1990s, the apartheid regime in South Africa worked to hierarchize raced bodies in a white supremacist system that has endured in the form of economic inequality and disenfranchisement. Rather than equating these racializing processes of the early-mid 1900s US and the mid-late 1900s South Africa, which play out legally and socially in very different enactments of sovereign power, I seek to demonstrate that examining the formation of the racialized subject that takes the form of the barbarian can offer new possibilities for countering racism and xenophobia.

Because of this ongoing mutation of sovereign whiteness, I return again in this chapter to the specter of Derrida's thinking that haunts my own investigation of sovereignty: "That's sovereignty, that's solitary and exceptional sovereignty: slave, animal, and no woman" (*Beast & the Sovereign* 55). Slavery and racial classification masquerade as embodied modes of dominance with de jure historical finitude, but in practice they are continually inscribed upon the

positionality of the Black subject.⁶⁹ The end of slavery did not mean the end of a racist injustice that extends into the very bodies of nonwhite populations, homogenizing them and writing a “less-than” upon their constituents. Slavery and racial overdetermination in this sense constitute another of the categorical exceptions by which I have characterized modern sovereignty in this project. Though slavery and racialization are not synonymous, it is often difficult to extricate one from the other. For this reason, in his study of Wright’s work Abdul R. JanMohamed uses “the terms *slave* and *black* interchangeably to refer to the black man or woman living in the South between 1900 and the 1950s as well as to Wright’s characters” (5). For JanMohamed, this overlap emphasizes death as the ever-present force of violent racism that constantly threatens Black Americans, conditioning even their most minute actions. It is almost too obvious to mention here that the historical position of the slave is that of one who is totally dominated in a legal exception that is fully and constantly embodied. This is a category, as Hobbes writes, “of those that are absolutely in the power of their masters, as slaves taken in war, and their issue, *whose bodies are not in their own power*, (their lives depending on the will of their masters...)” (431, emphasis added). Black Americans, living the conditions of a modern power haunted by slavery, are forced to negotiate a non-sovereign position in the twentieth century through power’s ever-present cognizance of bodily difference.

Larsen’s *Passing* makes present both the impossibility of racial ipseity, and the revenant of slavery. These themes are prefigured in the novel’s epigraph, taken from Countée Cullen’s poem “Heritage”:

One three centuries removed

⁶⁹ Like the sovereign category of Man, there is of course no real category of the “Black subject” capable of encapsulating the variety of Black experience. Sovereign whiteness, however, must pretend both that exactly the opposite is true, and that this is also true—to an extent—of itself.

*From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me? (Cullen 768)*⁷⁰

Here is the looming figure of an African homeland become alien to the twentieth-century African American, removed by time and by the bodily theft of the Middle Passage from the familial place. In these lines there surfaces a memory that brings on also a crisis of the body, and a crisis of memory: can these scenes have been so utopic as imagined? After colonialism and removal and enslavement, the question cannot be answered—as Frantz Fanon writes, these processes work intentionally to destroy Black history and render it irrecoverable (149). Cullen’s poem articulates a double estrangement, both from a fantastical past and from the place and race to which the African descendant has been removed to. Having been denied history, what identity can African American life have? As Marisa Parham has said of Cullen’s poem and its relationship with “historical loss,” the poem “produc[es] meaning through an incorporated contradiction...Cullen makes the work of coping corporeal, leaving it to a body constituted by sensational acts of longing and un/remembering” (441). The African American body here lacks full identification with its African past, an uncertainty that will come to inform the tenuousness of racial integrity in *Passing*. This is, Parham continues, a question both of historical-embodied being in the world, and of the revenant of the uncanny self: “In ‘Heritage,’ the narrator exists only as a tension between the history of himself in the world and what he experiences as his body’s memory of something he has never known, a haunting affect” (441). This haunting will

⁷⁰ These lines are not italicized in the epigraph to *Passing* (5).

become reflected in the transgressive movements within *Passing* and the estrangement from self and history that make passing possible.⁷¹

Passing turns on the contradictory quality of race itself. Race, on the one hand, is imagined by whites to be an embodied marker of pure exception, as it is by Clare Kendry's white husband, John Bellew. As many other characters in the novel realize, on the other hand—particularly Clare, who passes as white—racial boundaries are tenuous, and their transgression can provide benefits for one with a body of sufficiently uncertain racial characteristics. Race-based identification is therefore a precarious proposition, one beset by the specter of nonipseity and uncanny bodies.⁷² Clare's fluid racial positionality makes of her an unsettling, uncanny figure for those around her, a corporeal reminder of the estranged pasts, alienated bodies, and fragile racial identities that coalesce in their persons. Irene Redfield, recalling in the novel's opening part her first encounter with Clare in twelve years, describes the uncanny quality of coming face to face with the other who is both known and unknown, an encounter that elicits Irene's own self-uncertainty. “[G]radually there rose in Irene,” as she and Clare eye one-another without Irene knowing whom she is gazing at and being gazed at by, “a small inner disturbance, odious and hatefully familiar” (16). Fearful of being discovered, as she is herself passing for white in this moment, the uncanny discomfort of Irene's own Blackness resurfaces within her, within the restricted place of exception in the whites-only café at which the two meet.

⁷¹ In using Cullen's poem for her epigraph, Laura Doyle writes, Larsen “gesture[s] toward the historical and transatlantic horizon” of her authorship, a gesture that brings into view even before the novel's outset the ambivalent territorializations and deterritorializations of migration, themselves always an acknowledged or unacknowledged prior-to of African American modernism (545).

⁷² These issues are central to much African American modernist literature. The pretense of racial purity, for example, is cuttingly satirized in George Schuyler's *Black No More*. The plot of Schuyler's novel operates in some ways as a gender-swapped version of *Passing*, with a Black character (Max Disher) who becomes a white man and marries the daughter of a prominent white supremacist. Disher (now Matthew Fisher), finds it profitable to become a white supremacist himself, mobilizing the specter of Blackness and bodily nonipseity in the consolidation of his political-financial apparatus (e.g. 96).

Clare—“selfish, wilful, and disturbing” (73)—will continue to possess this uncanny quality in the novel, this capacity to elicit the absent center of racial power, both in white sovereignty and in Black community and history. In her death, which punctuates the close of the novel, Clare’s uncanny body moves to unsettle the sphere of sovereign whiteness as John, who discovers that she has been passing, must thereby discover as well that his own life has been indelibly shaped by a Blackness closer and more intimate to him than he would have allowed or thought possible. Nell Sullivan writes of Clare’s death—which comes about by her falling from a window—that “Significantly, her disappearance is punctuated by Bellew’s final, double invocation of *Nig*, her uncanny nickname; her destruction is commensurate with the racist meaning of that word” (382). John’s uncanny naming of Clare, which both asserts and obscures her race in their relationship, emerges as direct racial/racist descriptor in Clare’s unmasking and death. The fallout of this is the visceral warping of life and bodily integrity; the moment in which the epithet is etched on Clare’s body is also the moment at which John passes into the realm of the nonhuman, making “a sound not quite human, like a beast in agony” (Larsen 111). Likewise it is “the glorious body mutilated” that terrorizes Irene as she rushes down the stairs—not only the brutality of death, but the horror in this moment of uncertainty when perhaps the mutilated body yet lives, uncanny and undead (113). The transgressions of passing, which culminate in this moment where the human and the nonhuman, life and death, pass into one-another, assert the nonipseity at the center of the human: human bodies are incapable of living the stakes of their being as human, especially where those stakes are set on racial grounds. This is something that both John and Clare experience, in very different ways. In this way, my reading here contributes to current conversations on *Passing*, such as the anti-eugenicist reading of the novel put forth by Sami Schalk, by asserting that passing has the capacity to throw the very nature of the human

into question, in addition to its subversion of fixed racial identity. The resolution of the question of a humanity centered on race must be not only negotiated at the governmental level, as Christine Zabala has recently discussed with relation to Larsen's work, but also within individual bodies and in the realm of the discourse that codes them.

II. Race and the Nonhuman, through Biopower

We hardly need Hobbes to remind us that slaves are, by the very fact of being slaves, rendered nonhuman or less-than-human, that they are “bought and sold as beasts” (431). Derrida makes a similar point about sovereignty, that the sovereign body distinguishes itself as sovereign by setting itself apart from slaves, animals, women—from all of those embodied categories that must fall short of the human in order to render to Man his proper, exceptional dominance. This is not merely a historical observation, an economic aspect of slave trade in general, though such is almost certainly the case. The dehumanization constitutive of the life of the slave, as JanMohamed argues, continues to shape Black life into the twentieth century, insofar as that life is lived in constant reference to the death which could befall it at any moment. For Alexander Weheliye, the category of the human turns upon mechanisms of race and exclusion that feed into questions of species and sovereign power: “as an object of knowledge whiteness designates not actually existing groupings but a series of hierarchical power structures that apportion and delimit which members of the *Homo sapiens* species can lay claim to full human status” (19). Again, this is not a question of conflating modern Black life with the life of the slave, but of acknowledging and interrogating the ways in which the apparatus of dominance within the slave trade is perpetuated in the twentieth-century organization of Black life. “Given the histories of slavery, colonialism, segregation, lynching, and so on,” Weheliye writes, “humanity has always

been a principal question within Black life and thought in the west; or, rather, in the moment in which blackness becomes apposite to humanity, Man's conditions of possibility lose their ontological thrust, because their limitations are rendered abundantly clear" (19). Confronting the conditions of modern Blackness means confronting the terms of the human—of Man, described in gendered terms in my previous chapter—and the fact that these terms are and have been far from universal and benevolently inclusive.

The question of the human, as I have argued throughout this project, is the question of the sovereign, and of which bodies get to act as sovereigns before the law. Building from Hortense Spillers' work, Weheliye describes the "viscous deviances—the detours, digressions, and shortcuts that authorize violence as a vital layer in the attires of modern sovereignty—...whether these are found in current practices of torture in U.S. domestic and foreign prisons, or the hauntological histories of the Holocaust, slavery, and colonialism" (112). The nonsovereign body finds itself subject to a range of violence that attempts to reinscribe its exclusion, its deviance and separateness. The force of violence again and again marks nonsovereign bodies as nonhuman, marking as well the bounds of white huManity in its imagined ubiquity.⁷³ Hannah Arendt has marked this double limiting in terms of legal equity, noting that "The dark background of mere givenness...breaks into the political scene as the alien which in its all too obvious difference reminds us of the limitations of human activity—which are identical with the limitations of human equality" ("Perplexities of the Rights of Man," 94). The concept of the human, that is, is incapable of providing the grounds for equality within the political because the

⁷³ It could be argued in this sense that the point at which Man exercises violence in and as the practice of sovereign dominance marks the point at which sovereign authority deserts Man. Alexandre Kojève, for one, has suggested that "The mere fact of being compelled to call on the intervention of force (violence) proves that no Authority is involved here" (10). Whether the authoritarian violence that Weheliye describes was *compelled* to force or not, and what authority has ever been proper to Man, would constitute central questions in such an argument.

very fabrication of the human rests upon a distinction from the alien other, which it becomes only too easy to render on these grounds as an essentialized racial other. At the same time, the categorical notion of the human as basis for law always already undermines itself: “From the beginning the paradox involved in the declaration of inalienable human rights was that it reckoned with an ‘abstract’ human being who seemed to exist nowhere” (Arendt, “Perplexities of the Rights of Man” 83). Despite its nonexistence and nonipiseity, this abstract human being continuously exercises sovereign dominance and violence in modernity via the legalized policing of its unrealizable bodily norm,⁷⁴ policing which fixates especially on surface difference.

Although biopolitics makes possible a wide array of possible racial analyses, this cannot be undertaken without first confronting the fraught relationship between race and biopolitical thought in the latter’s key texts. In the “*Society Must Be Defended*” lectures, Foucault attempted to separate race from ethnicity, contending that “The social body is basically articulated around two races,” and that this dualism takes the shape of a “race war” (60). Race, from this perspective, is an othering-function not reducible to physical appearance or country of origin. For Foucault, grasping this means contending with a “biologico-social racism” in which “the other race is basically not the race that came from elsewhere or that was, for a time, triumphant and dominant, but that it is a race that is permanently, ceaselessly infiltrating the social body, or which is, rather, constantly being re-created in and by the social fabric” (61). In this construction, race (and the racism stemming from it) is not an outward-facing discrimination; race instead takes the shape of a “discourse of race struggle,” “the discourse of a battle that has to be waged...by a race that is portrayed as the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from that norm” (61). This Foucauldian

⁷⁴ This is a key distinction between modern, biopolitical sovereignty, and monarchical sovereignty: the King’s body does really exist, even if the source of his authority exceeds it. Modern Man, however, is nowhere to be found.

biopolitics of race/racism frames a strategy of waging war against the internal other. In this incessant regulation of aberrance through surveillance and attack, the racial norm ensures its own continued integrity to the socio-political order. As we will see, however, this Eurocentric framing remains inadequate for diagnosing the texture of non-white experiences before the racist globalizing state.

Agamben's racial critique, like Foucault's, has been painfully broad—capable of articulating a macro-level argument about the operations of modern dominance on life writ large, but almost totally unprepared to engage with the heterogeneous ways that this dominance impacts different individual lives, especially through slavery and racism. This is particularly evident in Agamben's concept of "bare life": "the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" (*Homo Sacer* 8). Responding to Arendt's work on concentration camps, Agamben emphasizes that "the radical transformation of politics into the realm of bare life (that is, into a camp) legitimated and necessitated total domination" (120). Bare life becomes the basic condition of all those excepted from the privileged sphere of modern sovereignty, a precarious position of life and nothing more. Weheliye has rightly taken issue with Agamben's application of bare life and the camp as tending to ignore individualized suffering in favor of categorical generalities, writing that,

If bare life embodies a potential dimension of contemporary politics as such, we might ask, then, why certain subjects are structurally more susceptible to personifying its actualization and why the concentration camp functions as the epitome of modern sovereignty for Agamben, especially considering that most instantiations of bare life do not necessarily entail physical mortality per se but other forms of political death. (35)

Weheliye responds to Agamben, and to Foucault and biopolitical discourse at large, through his concept of “racializing assemblages,” which envision race “as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” (4). The plurality and seriality of Weheliye’s approach is a necessary corrective to the top-down theorizing on race of much biopolitical thought, and it is an approach that I take many cues from in this project.

Foucault’s biopolitical analysis has been revised as well in recent years by theorists such as Achille Mbembe. Like JanMohamed, Mbembe emphasizes the role of death in the formation of the modern subject, contending that, when attention is paid to the legacies of colonialism and politicizations of race beyond Nazism, we must find that “the notion of biopower is insufficient to account for contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” (186). What Mbembe arrives at instead is what he terms “necropolitics and necropower” (186). Building on Foucault’s concept of racism as “a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (“*Society*” 254), Mbembe sketches a bleak politics based upon classifications that place certain kinds of bodies within the realm of disposability. Focusing on colonialism, and on Europe’s colonies as “the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended,” Mbembe asserts a particular political organization around race, one that draws upon Foucault and Arendt while being more heterogeneous and specific than either had imagined: “That colonies might be ruled over in absolute lawlessness stems from the racial denial of any common bond between the conqueror and the native. In the eyes of the conqueror, *savage life* is just another form of *animal life*...something alien beyond imagination” (172). Again, racial analysis of life and the political—whether the terms of biopolitics, necropolitics, or racializing assemblages takes place as the primary nomenclature—must confront the dehumanization (or

nonhumanization) of the essentialized racial other, the other to power whose categorical alterity slots bodies into hierarchical positions within the western political order. This is precisely what Fanon described in noting how the colonial subject is dehumanized and “reduced to the state of an animal”—a condition that works not only through physical abjection but through linguistic imperialism, the privileging of a western knowledge that argues a scientific basis for white supremacy, and the removal from and destruction of native spaces (7).

III. The Power of Life and Death: *Native Son*

The capacity to choose the bodies that deserve life and those that deserve death, and to enact killing action or legal elision upon the other, is the provenance of sovereignty. As Mbembe writes, “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides...in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die. Hence, to kill or to allow to live constitute the limits of sovereignty” (161). This sovereign power, in its racialized form, attaches itself differently to different bodies in different times and places, from the legal exception that made European conquest possible in Africa, to the legalized killing and nonhumanization of American slavery and the legacies of lynching and Jim Crow that followed. With colonialism as a backdrop—one never far from the history of slavery in the United States—I turn now to race and racism as embodied mechanisms of sovereignty in the 1930s Chicago of Wright’s *Native Son*.⁷⁵

JanMohamed, who works with bare life by reshaping it around what he calls “the death-bound-subject” (2), has described how death and sovereignty coincide in the lynch mob: “Each and every act or threat of lynching instantaneously defines and creates, ex nihilo, the lynch mob (and, by extension, each individual member of that mob) as sovereign power: the mob and the

⁷⁵ In my reading of Coetzee in section V of this chapter I return to racialized sovereignty in a colonial context.

individual decide, with absolute power, at that very moment who lives and who dies” (9). The lynch mob is a visceral and immanent instance of embodied white sovereignty, but this sovereignty also continuously functions in ways that are more submerged. “[S]overeign power is...defined via its capacity to draw and to become a border,” JanMohamed writes in his articulation of Agamben, and the experience of this bordering—particularly its presence as the threat of death—is constitutive of Black experience in modernity (8).

Bigger is constantly running up against the borders instituted by white sovereignty in *Native Son*, a sovereignty which overinscribes limitations on his social position, the places accessible to him, his experience, and his body. This limiting is oppressively present from the novel’s opening pages in the Thomas family’s cramped kitchenette, and only emphasized by the invasion of an enormous rat. The spatial cramp of the small apartment is further subdivided by the physical barriers erected for personal space and the epistemological barriers that Bigger imposes on himself and his relationship with his family: “he held toward them an attitude of iron reserve; he lived with them, but behind a wall, a curtain. And toward himself he was even more exacting” (10). Soon after, Bigger and his friend Gus discuss the socio-economic limitations of their lives, limitations that always return to the Blackness of their bodies; watching a skywriting advertising plane, Bigger muses that he “could fly one of them things if I had a chance” (16). “If you wasn’t black and if you had some money and if they’d let you go to that aviation school, you *could* fly a plane,” Gus responds (17). The insurmountability of this series of “ifs” is laughable, and the pair find it so (17), the difficulty of the latter two “ifs” being nothing to the impossibility of not being Black that precludes even any attempt at surmounting monetary and institutional boundaries.

The source of the apparatus of limits that overinscribe Bigger and Gus' lives—the *they*—is obvious: “‘It’s funny how the white folks treat us, ain’t it?’ ‘It better be funny,’ Gus said” (17). Less obvious is the promise of death that undergirds each of these limits, a racialized sovereignty that commands Blacks to adhere to a thick scaffolding of boundaries or risk categorization as those who must die. As JanMohamed argues, *Native Son* is most about “the threat of death as a form of coercion” (84-5), coercion which results in a “series of borders that incarcerate the subject within the cell of his social-death and that confine his knowledge of his incarceration” (85). Like JanMohamed, who mobilizes bare life for his analysis, Jack Taylor develops an Agambenian reading of *Native Son* by exploring the ways in which a critical race perspective expands the capacity of the “exclusionary inclusion” that Agamben’s biopolitical thought is based in (Taylor 184). As Taylor argues however, bare life and the exclusive inclusion alone do not sufficiently theorize the political and legal position of the Black subject; the concept of the “zone of indistinction between outside and inside” is itself here overly indeterminate (Agamben 19). It is necessary, beyond bare life, to understand how “blacks become killable subjects to maintain a racialized social order” (Taylor 185).

I agree that Agamben cannot carry us through an understanding of the complexity and durability of this social order, which forces an inquiry into how Black life in particular has been rendered disposable by the western state at its very foundation. Nor, I think, can the notion of a subject bound by death (as in JanMohamed) fully account for the ways in which Black life is produced and fostered by a state intent on drawing upon it for its own perpetuation. Most of all, what is missing from JanMohamed and Taylor—and from Wright, for that matter—is the question of what lies beyond the bounds set by impending death. What would a radically

different relationship between a state and its racialized subjects look like if the threat of death was, if not excised, made a secondary condition behind mutual care and personal wellbeing?

As JanMohamed describes, Bigger's world is saturated with death—with the actual deaths of the rat, of Mary and Bessie, and with Bigger's death sentence that takes us to the end of the novel, as well as with the social death of being forced to inhabit an impoverished and rigidly circumscribed world.⁷⁶ Death marks the limits of Bigger's experience, both as the punishment levied against him for transgressing the bounds of his nonsovereign agency,⁷⁷ and as the violence he enacts on the women around him in an effort to expand the scope of his world. Death in *Native Son* is both a limiting and an opening, in each case as the irruption of a sovereign agency within Bigger's experience of the world. Killing Mary is for Bigger a relief of an imposition that affects him ontologically and bodily: "now that he had killed Mary he felt a lessening of tension in his muscles; he had shed an invisible burden he had long carried" (114).⁷⁸ Bigger's killing of Mary is an absolutely sovereign act in the classic Foucauldian sense, an enactment of the "right to take life or let live" ("*Society*" 241), but also in the Derridean and biopolitical sense—a participation in the disparate power of modern sovereignty that consists in discarding bodies on biological premises. Thus Bigger "did not feel sorry for Mary; she was not real to him, not a human being" (114). Killing Mary gives Bigger a brief glimpse of the sovereign position, a transgression soon followed by the mobilization of a legal apparatus in an effort to reassert Bigger's position of subservience and in the enactment of punishment by trial and death.

⁷⁶ For more on actual-death versus social-death, see JanMohamed 86.

⁷⁷ We might think again here of Clare Kendry, whose punishment for passing is death.

⁷⁸ Cf. JanMohamed 19 on "the use-value of death" for Bigger. This murder is for Bigger an unveiling of possibilities beyond the limits on his life he had experienced to this point: "The hidden meaning of his life...had spilled out....Now that the ice was broken, could he not do other things? What was there to stop him?" (Wright 106).

This overwhelming presence of death, and the constant experience of death as the limit to experience in *Native Son*, creates a particular kind of world for Bigger, one that resonates strongly with the Spivakian notion of world as a limiting, overdetermined spatial and ontological situation. Death, of course, marks the closure of being, the moment when “I will no longer be there, *da*” (*Beast & the Sovereign* 126). But death cannot for this reason be set aside from life, as its constant presence and threat in *Native Son* reminds us. In fact, as Heidegger has argued, death is constitutive of *Dasein*, of our Being-in-the-world; although “Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of *Dasein*,” death is also “a possibility-of-Being which *Dasein* itself has to take over in every case. With death, *Dasein* stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than *Dasein*’s Being-in-the-world” (294). Death, inappropriable, sits beyond and within life as an impossibility that must be grappled with in the pursuit of the fullness of Being. Bigger’s struggle with death, however, subverts the Heideggerean notion. In enacting death on others, Bigger experiences a greater fullness of his being by carrying out a sovereign act that temporarily displaces the sovereign dominance, itself backed by the threat of murder, that circumscribes his life.

The sovereign threatening of death as a mechanism of limiting is worlding as unworlding. Death sets absolute limits to the possible, but the internalization of this impossibility has the capacity to reset ontological boundaries, as Bigger discovers. Pheng Cheah has framed this dialectic of world/unworld not in terms of death, but of time, which likewise supposes both strict (quantitative) limits and unboundedness: “because all calculations presuppose the persistence of time and this is incalculable, every unworlding points to the irreducible possibility of the opening of another world” (*What Is a World?* 10).⁷⁹ This is a somewhat rosy outlook on dominance, and

⁷⁹ Cheah has elsewhere expanded this notion of time and unworld into the context of colonial slavery, noting that “Slaves experienced the temporality of the plantation world as worldlessness in a double sense. First, because slaves

Wright offers a necessary corrective—death’s unlimiting potential, in the context of racialized sovereignty, can take the shape of a solipsism or a zero-sum game where the creation of a new world for one person means the unworlding (even the killing) of another person. The result is that *Native Son* exists in a kind of necropolitical unworld that Mbembe has called a death-world: “in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (186). The death-world is an idiosyncrasy of modern necropower, the sovereign capacity to hold a population—say, the Black inhabitants of Chicago’s South Side—within rigid limits that are political, economic, and sexual. Such a population exists in a zombified state of life inundated with death, oppressed by the constant and real threat of murder as a measure of compliance.⁸⁰ By holding its others in this way, the white supremacist state maintains its ownership of the world and its possibilities. Breaking this grip requires mobilizing an anti-racist ethics that recognizes where inequity exists and envisions possible futures that are structured very differently. Such futures would require their own reconfiguration of ownership of the world, in a literal and a philosophical sense.

IV. Death and Responsibility

Native Son has been frequently critiqued for its brutality and misogynistic violence, most notably by James Baldwin.⁸¹ Recently, however, readings like JanMohamed’s have opened ways

have no agency in regulating and controlling the time of their daily lives, they cannot be actors in a world....Second, they cannot create a home in this location where they have been forcibly transported because, as the property of others, they cannot lay claim to their surroundings” (*What Is a World?* 223).

⁸⁰ bell hooks, describing the dehumanization of Black people in the twentieth century, has made a related point: “Reduced to the machinery of bodily physical labor, black people learned to appear before whites as though they were zombies, cultivating the habit of casting the gaze downward so as not to appear uppity” (340).

⁸¹ E.g. 22. Robert James Butler glosses a few such early critiques; see esp. 9.

for critically examining the novel's violence that go beyond condemnation. It is not necessary, such critiques demonstrate, to find Bigger's murder of Mary and murder and rape of Bessie palatable in order to appreciate that the presence of these events in the narrative might render possible political readings that are unavailable in work less preoccupied with the sexist rage and disdain for life that Bigger displays. Andrew Warnes, for example, has suggested that the misogynistic violence in Wright's novel, which presents "another example of...female disintegration," still productively "drew attention to its basis in misogynistic fantasy" (161). In this sense, the novel has much to tell us about "the different ways in which a culture invested in chastity and male power finally reframes sex *as* violence" (Warnes 178). In a different methodological approach, Loren Kruger has applied sociology and an urban planning analysis of segregation to explore how violent actions arise in relation to violent state articulations of space (e.g. 35). And Sondra Guttman, in an article on "Rereading Violence Against Women in *Native Son*," demonstrates that "Wright's focus on sexual violence...can be seen as a reaction to the way the twin threats of rape and lynching, and the stereotypes that supported them were used as ideological tools to split the working class along racial lines" (171).

While I acknowledge the traumatic aspects of Wright's novel, I think it important to pay attention to the effects of structural racism and violence that emerge brutally in *Native Son*. Bigger's actions can never be explained away by pointing to the violence practiced upon Black lives by the state, but if we are to account for the acts Bigger commits then we can do so only by also attempting to account for the violent environment in which he lives. Above I've synthesized a few approaches that develop violence in *Native Son* upon its misogynistic lines, but each of these analyses remains ensconced within questions of who is practicing violence upon who, and what broader forms of violence can be deduced from those representations. Violence in *Native*

Son can indeed help to articulate the necropolitical conditions of African American life and the ways in which the Black subject becomes bound by death, as well as how those conditions differently affect Black women. What's yet missing are the ways in which racialized subjectivity can exceed the bounds of misogyny, violence, and death when that exceeding is excavated from within the very violent structure that we've become accustomed to by this point. That is, taking social death and actual death as very real conditions of Black life that are experienced quite differently for Black men and Black women, and for Black people in different places, what kinds of responses, what kinds of responsibilities can be gleaned from the seemingly ubiquitous presence of this violence?

Attention to death and the ubiquity of violence orient us toward the binding power of death in another sense—death's capacity to bind the subject to itself in identifying a subject by the death that belongs to it. In this way, death alerts us to a responsibility: I must take responsibility for my own death, and I must also recognize that every other also has a death that is uniquely their own. Death thereby brings into view the impossible responsibility we have to ourselves and to everyone else, the responsibility to consider each as individual vis-à-vis their death. I have written above and in previous chapters that sovereignty is haunted by nonipseity. Not only does the sovereign body of Man not actually exist, but even the notion of that sovereign exception is founded upon a setting-aside of the non-sovereign by which this non-presence becomes constitutive of sovereignty, in a kind of sovereign abjection. Death, however, restores ipseity to the subject on an individual level; the encounter with death allots the subject a sovereign position, *within the singularity of their body and life*, rather than in the categorical terms of biopower.

As Derrida writes, “Everyone must assume their own death, that is to say, the one thing in the world that no one else can *either give or take*: therein resides freedom and responsibility” (*Gift of Death* 45).⁸² “The sameness of the oneself,” Derrida writes shortly after, “is *given* by death” (46). Our death is uniquely our own, and even our murder cannot deny us that (*ibid.* 45). Bigger’s murders of Mary and Bessie are acts of sovereignty in a very classical sense, by which Bigger appropriates the discarding capacity of a patriarchal necropower, the capacity to determine which women must die. And Bigger feels the experience of this power as one of sovereignty and of insistent ipseity and agency; his murder of Bessie leaves him with “a queer sense of power. *He* had done this. *He* had brought all this about” (239). But this glimpse of sovereign power—the power of the (white) Man that Bigger feels dominating his life—is obviously not a durable experience of sovereignty. What is revealed in Bigger’s fleeting experience of sovereign power, however, is not simply that because of structural racism he can only ever experience a taste of sovereign power in its most deplorable excesses. Rather, Bigger’s experience hollows out sovereign power itself: if sovereignty exists where privileged bodies have the capacity to dole out death sentences, yet (as Derrida writes) cannot truly *give* death to anyone, then the very instant at which white supremacy and structural racism exercise their key capacity is also the instant at which their sovereignty fails. This is far from saying that the violence of structural racism is insignificant. Instead, the point is that the seemingly omnipresent power of sovereign whiteness rests upon a fiction, and by retaining and focusing the sovereignty we can each only retain over our own lives and deaths we might begin to carve out a new responsibility to ourselves and others.

⁸² Cf. JanMohamed’s reading of this passage, 280.

Bigger never confronts the responsibility that death and self-identity might orient us to, but in facing his own death he does engage with the forces of control that brought him to his end. In his final exchange with Max, the latter describes the racial divide and the divide in opinion against Bigger as analogous to divisions of class: “on both sides men want to live; men are fighting for life. Who will win? Well, the side that feels life most, the side with the most humanity and the most men” (428). Bigger’s response, in the face of being put to death by a sovereign state power, is to avow his own sovereign individuality. “I reckon I believe in myself,” Bigger says; “[W]hen I think about what you say,” he continues, “I kind of feel what I wanted. It makes me feel I was kind of right....They wouldn’t let me live and I killed” (428). This response interrogates the premises of Max’s position, and Max’s distraught reactions to Bigger’s speech can be read as both the horror he feels at Bigger’s refusal to disavow his acts, and the confusion of the very political terms that Bigger asserts.

Bigger’s actions, in fact, *were* right. He is correct when he proclaims, “What I killed for must’ve been good!” (429). This is not to say, of course, that murdering and raping are morally acceptable, but that what’s *right* and *good* is what those in power do to those they have power over.⁸³ For the person whose life is lived in the constant presence of racism and death, the capacity to enact death on others appears as something to aspire to. And so Max is more correct than he knows when he states that “the side with the most humanity” will win, in that the human is precisely the territory of dominance and its bounds are legislated by sovereign power.⁸⁴ By murdering to ensure his continued life, Bigger attempts to appropriate the right of death that

⁸³ We might compare this with Baldwin’s reading, in “Many Thousands Gone,” of how “the courtroom, judge, jury, witnesses and spectators, recognize immediately that Bigger is their creation and they recognize this not only with hatred and fear and guilt and the resulting fury of self-righteousness but also with that morbid fullness of pride mixed with horror with which one regards the extent and power of one’s wickedness” (43).

⁸⁴ Žižek contends that “the *truth* of the discourse of universal human rights” consists precisely in its hierarchies and exclusions, in “*the Wall separating those covered by the umbrella of Human Rights and those excluded from its protective cover*” (150).

Foucault describes: “This death that was based on the right of the sovereign is now manifested as simply the reverse of the right of the social body to ensure, maintain, or develop its life” (*History of Sexuality* 136). What is right and good in the biopolitical register is what maintains life, even if it does so by killing. Bigger’s murdering and raping is a displacement of the death and sexualized dominance he has received⁸⁵ and will receive before the law.⁸⁶ Thinking this in a global context, we should similarly bear in mind that colonialism and imperialism engrained the value of violence and western preeminence as the foundations of the modern subject, resulting in the myriad modes of internalized control and self-destructive violence in decolonizing countries named by *coloniality* (Mignolo, “Decolonizing Western Epistemology” 24-5).

The responsibility that death orients us to, to return to Derrida, is the responsibility to the other in light and by the very fact of the impossibility of such a responsibility. “It is from the perspective of death as the place of my irreplaceability, that is, of my singularity, that I feel called to responsibility” (*Gift of Death* 42). This singularity resides beyond and within one’s life and, while being entirely and only proper to that life, can never be grasped within the realm of life. Confrontation with death as this constitutive impossibility alerts us to our responsibility to the other, to the other as impossible singularity who likewise has proper to them a death that we cannot take or give: “Death is very much that which nobody else can undergo or confront in my place. My irreplaceability is therefore conferred, ‘given,’ one can say, by death” (ibid.). As Derrida writes, here is a kind of responsibility that would alert us to “the subject’s relation to

⁸⁵ See JanMohamed; e.g. 95 on “Bigger’s explicit insistence that rape is not just what one does to women but also what racialized society has done to him.”

⁸⁶ This closing portion of the novel has long been a point of contention in Wright scholarship. For an early reading, see Siegel, esp. 521. Robert Butler made the case that Bigger’s reflection on the goodness of his actions “is at best a half-truth. Although such violence has awakened in him a vision of how his world in fact operates, it is not seen by Wright as finally ‘good’ because it is a dead end” (22). More recently, Doreen Fowler has argued that “Bigger’s insistence that the murders tapped his essential nature seems to issue from a concept of manhood like Freud’s, a notion of maleness as defined by aggressive drives” (69).

itself as an instance of liberty, singularity, and responsibility, the relation to self as being before the other: the other in its infinite alterity...whose infinite goodness *gives* in an experience that amounts to a *gift of death*” (ibid. 5). Facing death, Bigger follows the dominant logic of death as the coercive force that whiteness uses to perpetuate its own life. But there is a responsibility that might be gleaned from this confrontation with death, and Bigger’s final moments hold the capacity to uncover this responsibility.

The racism and violence that saturate and inscribe Bigger’s world are founded on a notion of the other as a limiting concept. Under necropower, the other is categorized and overdetermined, situated within the bodily categories of the disposable or the sustainable. The impossibility of this situation is straightforward: when the right and good become overinscribed means toward perpetuating sovereign power, and death becomes the primary machinery of politics, the world becomes unlivable and without potential. Here the link between structural racism in the United States and colonial hierarchies of race becomes clear, as both trade upon stereotyping and constricting non-white bodies, confining them within realms of biological inferiority while also setting them aside in de-invested urban zones and ejecting Black life from the space of politics and economic possibility. And so, in rethinking the close to Wright’s book, we might consider the gift that Bigger gives in the moment of anticipating his death, when he reasserts his investment in an individualistic morality that reflects the logic of white supremacy and femicide. This moment, in which Bigger betrays his own all-American coloniality, clarifies the fact that structural racism—which is of course global, though unevenly so—kills to demonstrate its power, and those it threatens to kill also kill as a demonstration of its power, and finally that all of this killing can lead only to a horror of our global racist order. Bigger’s final sentiments give away the path our responsibility to a more equitable world must take: the good

itself, the values of dominance that are passed down to its subjects through violence and coloniality, must be destroyed.

Bigger's presence within necropower and as a death-bound-subject alert us to the urgency of a global responsibility to the other that might exceed and erode this power. To this end, I turn in what remains of this chapter to one form of such a responsibility: that of hospitality.

V. Hospitality and Barbarity

There are, as Derrida describes, two aspects of responsibility, which “demands on the one hand an accounting, a general answering-for-oneself with respect to the general and before the generality, hence the idea of substitution; and on the other hand, uniqueness, absolute singularity, hence nonsubstitution, nonrepetition, silence, and secrecy” (*Gift of Death* 62). Bigger's responsibility is to himself and it often takes the form of an accounting. Murdering Mary provides Bigger with a sense of possession, with “something that was all his own...it was the first time in his life he had had anything that others could not take from him” (105). And one of his first acts after killing Bessie and disposing of her body is quite literally an accounting: “*Good God! Goddamn, yes, it was in her dress pocket!....He had thrown Bessie down the air-shaft and the money was in the pocket of her dress!....Well, he would have to do without money; that was all....He had seven cents between him and starvation and the law and the long days ahead*” (239).⁸⁷ Below, I attempt to draw out responsibility's other aspect, its capacity to make us face the other's “uniqueness, absolute singularity...nonsubstitution, nonrepetition, silence, and secrecy,” with a hospitality that allows for that other to enter our world unconditionally. I turn in this endeavor to Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In this move, I attempt to further the

⁸⁷ The disposability that sovereign power renders to bodies is hard to make much starker than it is in Bigger's lament at his oversight when getting rid of Bessie's body, of “Throwing her away with all that money in her pocket” (239).

conversation on biopolitics, the state, and law that has grown around Coetzee's work via critics like Richard Barney, Barbara Eckstein, and Patrick Lenta, respectively.

Coetzee's novel centers around the anticipation of a barbaric invasion that never arrives, on the threatening specter of the unknown and menacing stranger on the horizon. The text is occupied with the politics and legislation of othering, which take shape as an imperial police state concerned with maintaining a safe separation from any difference that might come. This 1980 novel takes place predominantly in an isolated imperial outpost, which is brought under military control as fear of an invasion of indigenous "barbarians" mounts. Coetzee's unnamed narrator, who begins the novel as "a country magistrate, a responsible official in the service of the Empire, serving out my days on this lazy frontier, waiting to retire" (8-9), later becomes a prisoner of the military government that replaces him, and finally rejects empire, even as he becomes cognizant of its inescapability: "I wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects" (178). The magistrate gradually comes to realize that the essentialized categories of civilization and barbarity, by which the novel makes its racial distinctions, are a fiction through which sovereign power justifies its authority and violence—an exclusion by which empire manages its interior. To return to Mbembe, the sovereign machinery of this colonial and imperial power operates formally both in space and culture:

Colonial occupation... was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area—of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations. The writing of new spatial relations (territorialization) was, ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves...the classification of people according to different categories...the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries. These imaginaries gave

meaning to the enactment of differential rights to differing categories of people for different purposes within the same space; in brief, the exercise of sovereignty.

(173-4)

Coetzee's imperial police state enacts this sovereign division with militaristic fervor by delimiting the rigid space of the colony, incessantly patrolling its borders and seeking to maintain its hierarchies through the formal maintenance of the civilized/barbaric divide.

By the novel's close, concerns of external danger are overshadowed by the internal devastation brought on by the imperial personnel, who finally consume and destroy the colony they purported to be protecting. This violence upon the self is characteristic of imperialism; expanding power and territory by colonialism means dehumanizing and destroying the barbarian other in a recursive process that can only devalue Western humanist principles and require constant policing of the self for difference. Aimé Césaire, for one, has described how "colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him...to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism" (35). Empire, as Coetzee describes it, inscribes itself in a world that is temporal and contingent: "Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history" (153-4). This empire, which Coetzee's magistrate confronts in the suicide of his colony, is a self-consuming world, a social system that annihilates itself in attempting its self-perpetuation. The history of empire is one of such self-destruction via the destruction of the other, blotting out the unknown along with any possibilities beyond the dominance of sovereign Western Man.

Coetzee's novel is occupied with boundaries, invasion, and maintaining norms, primarily those of "civilization." This is an empire of and in crisis, attempting to eradicate alterity in a process of consumption that becomes internal when an external other fails to appear. It is also a biopolitical empire obsessed with perpetuating its own life, and with the killing it may need to undertake in order to do so. As Coetzee's magistrate contemplates, "One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era. By day it pursues its enemies....By night it feeds on images of disaster" (154). Crisis and catastrophe are foundational perpetuating forces for empire; these are mechanisms for the interplay of delimitation and de-limitation by which empire sustains itself, particularly through capital. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe this in *Empire*, "crisis is for capital a normal condition that indicates not its end but its tendency and mode of operation. Capital's construction of imperialism and its move beyond it are both given in the complex play between limits and barriers" (222). While this play allows for the creation of the malleable ubiquity of modern empire that Hardt and Negri have identified, that insistent de- and re-territorialization also presents vulnerabilities—namely, the process describes a globalization forever closed in its own logic of accumulation.⁸⁸

The colony in Coetzee's novel offers a specific instance of empire reflective of empire's larger hegemony as described by Hardt and Negri, both of which operate upon a newly modern sovereign logic: "Wherever modern sovereignty took root, it constructed a Leviathan that overarched its social domain and imposed hierarchical territorial boundaries, both to police the purity of its own identity and to exclude all that was other" (Hardt and Negri xii). While Hardt

⁸⁸ Compare this with Nancy's notion of the "*agglomeration*" that takes place in globalization and carries "senses of conglomeration, of piling up, with the sense of accumulation that, on the one hand, simply concentrates...the well-being that used to be urban or civil, while on the other hand, proliferates what bears the quite simple and unmerciful name of misery" (33).

and Negri are right that classical sovereignty persists in the form of state-regulated borders, which trickle down into the identity of a citizenry, the hierarchy suggested here is oversimplified. As I argue, sovereignty inheres not only in the policing of space and the erection of national boundaries—it also is practiced by the state through biopolitical processes that act directly on bodies in far less visible ways. So in responding to Hardt and Negri we should think sovereignty as not merely a spatial/identificatory apparatus with a seeming invincibility thanks to its appetite for crisis. We must add to this, first, that when sovereignty acts upon raced bodies that the strictures of place contain a texture and shiftiness exceeding that of national boundaries; and second that capitalism’s interminable cycle of crises takes places within a logic that is internal to it. And so the processes of both global consumption and local violence that have been so inextricable from one another since the dawn of imperialism—these processes are not immortal, and we must attend to the divisions they inscribe that are cartographical as well as embodied.

External to the logic of empire, in its insistent othering and capturing, its de- and re-territorialization, is the (il)logic of hospitality. Hospitality, radical hospitality that engages our responsibility to the other, is characterized by an openness that insistently throws into question any legality. Radical (“absolute”) hospitality, creates a “break with the law of hospitality as right or duty,” a right or duty necessarily limited by its very quality as a right guided by parameters (*Of Hospitality* 25). Instead, as Derrida writes, “absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner...but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them” (ibid.). With Spivakian worlding and Mbembe’s discussion of colonial occupation in mind, absolute hospitality asserts a practice of the responsible relationship with the other that makes to the other a gift of the place of the home. “*The law of unlimited hospitality*” is “to give the new arrival all of one’s home and oneself, to give him or her one’s

own, our own, without asking a name, or compensation” (ibid. 77). This unlimited law is a just law, a law that exceeds legal beholdenness. Unlimited hospitality therefore forces a revision of sovereignty, just as it forces a new worlding that arises with the unbidden arrival of the other. “Let us say *yes to who or what turns up,*” Derrida urges, “before any determination...before any *identification,* whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female” (ibid.). Recalling Derrida’s description of the sovereign revisited repeatedly throughout this project, absolute hospitality is a sovereign act that is beyond the logic of sovereignty.⁸⁹

Coetzee’s novel, on the other hand, is premised in its very title on an inhospitality, on the threat of an other already rendered barbaric and unwanted, yet inevitable. The magistrate’s meeting with Colonel Joll—who has arrived “under the emergency powers” (1)—that opens the novel takes place under the pretense that “The barbarian tribes were arming,” that “the Empire should take precautionary measures, for there would certainly be war” (9). Joll operates throughout as a kind of border guard, taking his troops to attack and capture the native inhabitants with the aim of breaking up their tribes and preventing them from encroaching on the territory claimed by the empire. The barbarian, however, exceeds even the alterity of the foreigner, one whose strange but not wholly unknown difference must be either preserved and policed or assimilated into erasure. “As representatives of the Law, that is of state sovereignty and state power,” Henk van Houtum writes, “border guards...decide what is real or not and they decide who is allowed in or not. They are performing the Law. The individual is trespassing on a

⁸⁹ See *Of Hospitality* 55: “No hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one’s home, but since there is also no hospitality without finitude, sovereignty can only be exercised by...excluding and doing violence.” As Anne Dufourmantelle points out in this text, “*What [Derrida] incites us toward is a progressive desertion of the world attested by a sovereign reason*” (134).

piece of land that they wait at...He/she is a foreigner, not from here, who has to ask for permission to enter and for hospitality” (287). The magistrate too is a glorified border guard, an agent of the empire who must preserve its order, despite his fantasy that “the line that marks the frontier on the maps of Empire will grow hazy and obscure till we are blessedly forgotten” (156). It is the task of both men, and of empire itself, to be inhospitable to the other, to patrol for and attack difference, at its worst, at its best to regulate and appropriate the other. As the magistrate says of himself and Joll, these are the “Two sides of imperial rule” (156).

The other—the barbarian, the foreigner, the stranger—embodies a difference that the empire cannot tolerate, a difference which manifests racially. The division between the civilized and the barbaric recalls Foucault’s notion of the “race war,” of a “social body...articulated around two races” (“*Society*” 60), but the magistrate also makes overtures to the bodily localization of racism on a couple of occasions. He wonders, for example, how to “eradicate contempt, especially when that contempt is founded on nothing more substantial than differences in table manners, variations in the structure of the eyelid?” (58)⁹⁰; when he meets a group of native people, he remarks first upon their animal companions, animal attire, the color of their skin, and again the shape of their eyes: “they emerge, men mounted on shaggy ponies...dressed in sheepskin coats and caps, brown-faced, weatherbeaten, narrow-eyed, the barbarians in the flesh on native soil” (80). Shadi Neimneh has noted that in the novel “What the Empire seeks is to impose its power on the alleged barbarians as a race,” which it does by “us[ing] the body as target for achieving control over its subjects and enemies. It directly touches the bodies of the barbarians” (33) through instances of biopower such as “sanitary habits, rationed food, and public torture” (34). Analogously to Foucault’s line of thinking on race as a biopolitical

⁹⁰ Cf. Neimneh 32.

apparatus, Walter Mignolo has detailed a sixteenth-century genealogy of racism that centers on the category of the barbarian in the thought of Bartolomé de Las Casas, who identified four varieties of barbarism. This taxonomy, Mignolo writes, was “a racial classification, although not based on skin color. *It was racial because it ranked human beings in a top-down scale assuming the ideals of Western Christians as the criteria*” (*The Idea of Latin America* 17). Classification of this kind, though theoretical in conception, inheres in practice in bodies that are raced as different and deficient, a difference that empire must maintain if its own (socio-political) body is to be preserved.⁹¹

The barbarian, the intolerable other beyond foreignness, makes present a racial differentiation that, through biopower’s bodily preoccupation, becomes biological and species-centric. Contra absolute hospitality, empire is thoroughly concerned with the forms taken by the life that turns up in its conquests, to the extent that it works to render the other nonhuman before the fact in an effort to circumvent any hospitable response. As Paulo Freire describes, “dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (44). The description recalls Césaire, who reminds us that this dehumanization is coextensive, that “the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal” (41). Coetzee’s narrator experiences this coextensive dehumanization—the barbarism inherent in empire’s civilizing mission—in the later portions of the novel, as he and Joll clash over the magistrate’s interactions with the native people. Of his

⁹¹ For those that empire subjugates in pursuing this aim, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o points out, the options are death, or allowing a dominance and extraction that amounts to social death: “Imperialism, led by the USA, presents the struggling peoples of the earth and all those calling for peace, democracy and socialism with the ultimatum: accept theft or death” (3).

experiences being tortured by Joll's men, the magistrate observes that "They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well, which very soon forgets them" under physical torment (132). "They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity," the former magistrate continues, "and in the space of an hour they showed me a great deal" (133). Coetzee's narrator perceives here the emptiness of the human as privileged category—the sort of emptiness that Bigger insinuates into Max's vision of humanist victory—the category by which the oppressor extricates his sovereign, "whole and well" body from the less-than-human body that can be penetrated and broken. The very cruelty of the sovereign human action of torturing the other undermines the pious wellness pretended to inhere in the human category.

VI. Hospitable Worlds

The narrative world of *Waiting for the Barbarians* is shaped by the logic of imperialism, which in the novel is a logic of racial apartheid. The reader's vision of this logic, however, is shaped and in some places clouded by the novel's allegorical presentation and its narrator's naivete. Early on, the magistrate experiences his imperial life as coming within a world of openness and possibility, channeling a solipsistic political optimism: "From the sky thousands of stars look down on us. Truly we are here on the roof of the world" (2). As the story progresses, his optimism remains, but he becomes more cognizant of the world's limits, and how those relate to his own positionality: "Only with a deliberate effort can I reinsert myself into time and space: into a bed, a tent, a night, a world, a body pointing west and east" (72).

Upon returning to the settlement, having met with a group of native people to return to them one of their own, the magistrate is charged with treason and imprisoned. At this point, he

begins to become aware of the limitations placed on those “barbarians” who have been captured and tortured; he experiences, that is, the spatial overinscription of a necropower that has recategorized his life as disposable, an overinscription that also reshapes his world and, as above, his sense of his own body. In prison, the magistrate begins to appreciate “how tiny I have allowed them to make my world, how I daily become more like a beast or a simple machine” (98); he feels the need to “remind myself of a world beyond” (98), of “The flow of events in the outside world” (101), eventually to ask himself “How long have I been locked away from the world...?” (113). This loss of the world—loss of the sense that the world’s unlimitedness is available to him—coincides with the magistrate’s fall from the position of political sovereignty within empire. “He has sovereign power only when he acts in accordance with the state’s aims”; after his treason, “he finds himself an abandoned subject who no longer enjoys the protections of the law” (Lochner 121). Like the natives taken captive, the magistrate is finally discarded, on the brink of homo-sacerization,⁹² set aside as an inconsequential body within the settlement.

In his transition from the place of the sovereign, allotted unlimited access to the world and tasked with the domination of its other bodies, to the nonsovereign position of the tortured subject, whose life is rigidly circumscribed and haunted by the looming specter of death, the magistrate’s experience of the world begins to approach that of the raced subject against which the empire has pitched itself. Not, of course, that he ever attains this kind of raced position. Though he is tortured and made a public spectacle of, the magistrate always finds a home in the settlement and he never is so expendable that the novel moves to kill him. This perspective on the novel is familiar. Still missing is a sense of what ethical imperatives might be drawn from

⁹² Cf. Lochner 114.

such an analysis, imperatives that exceeds anti-imperial condemnation as well as the hope for utopia beyond the novel's close.

Stef Craps argues of Coetzee's novel that it "opens up the possibility of the creation of a new, truly inclusive collectivity, a community...founded on a recognition of our infinite difference" (59).⁹³ The prospects of founding this "truly inclusive collectivity" at the novel's close, however, seem to me rather dim. If nothing else, the native population is justifiably unlikely to forget the torment and dispossession they've recently been subject to. But what becomes clear in such a reading of Coetzee is that the apprehension of the barbaric in its alterity must also carry apprehension of an enduring responsibility to the other. In Liani Lochner's framing, the novel offers "ethical and political potential...through the role of the hospitable reader, one who is open to an experience of alterity" (107). Against the inhospitality of imperialism and apartheid: the responsibility of hospitality. Such responsibility is more than theoretical and epistemological—it is embodied. Coetzee's closing does not guarantee an openness, it does not promise the possibility of radically remaking the colony with the other on whose land it was stolen from, an uncertain risking of the bodies and spaces of the remaining occupiers and what barbarians might now arrive. But it doesn't rule this out, either.

It may appear that precisely what takes place in the closing to *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a kind of violently utopic outcome that seems supremely desirable. Painful, yes, but a chance to reset and build something new outside of the grasp of capitalist empire. So when "The soldiery tyrannizes the town" and eventually necessitates the departure of the militaristic arm of empire, the Magistrate is left with a town in shambles *but* also the annihilation of the colonial system (Coetzee 150). Such a reading, I think, would be mistaken. For one, embracing the self-

⁹³ Likewise, Lenta argues that in Coetzee's conclusion there is a potential "ethical dimension," in that the Magistrate's sense of stupidity extricates him from empire's "negative construction of otherness" (79).

annihilation of any political system visits incalculable harm upon its people. To treat this as a kind of “collateral damage” in the building of a more just politics is only to embrace the nihilistic logic of the democracy we know, which “does not simply negate but is festive and even apocalyptic” (Brown 75). Even positing the desirability of the outcome, even assuming it is achieved, even suggesting that the end of *Waiting for the Barbarians* resembles an achievable ground for equitable renewal—what is to replace racism and imperialism? This supposed reprieve from conflict must make us suspicious. The colony remains on appropriated land, a product of genocides past and dreamed into the future, as is the United States. The enemy never disappears—the vacuum suggested in Coetzee’s conclusion is saturated by the absence of an unknown barbaric other that has only come to take on a less threatening hue alongside the now-evident barbarism of the imperial state. But that othering logic remains, and remains lived in the place of the colony.

Like Bigger, the magistrate’s world in the later portions of the book is bound by both physical confinement and the state’s retribution of his transgressions, but unlike in the cases of Bigger and Clare Kendry, the threat of death as punishment for transgression never materializes for the magistrate. Much of this has to do with the very transition Coetzee’s narrator makes; in his move to the nonsovereign subject position, the magistrate is always haunted by his former sovereign privilege. This is never the case with the racialized other, always already nonsovereign before the law. Hospitality as we know it, as it is set into law, can never be open to “the absolute other, the barbarian, the savage absolutely excluded and heterogeneous” (*Of Hospitality* 21).⁹⁴ As absolute other, the barbarian in fact exceeds the overdeterminations of racism and sovereign exception. “[T]he right to hospitality,” Derrida writes, “commits a household, a line of descent, a

⁹⁴ This passage speaks to an important distinction between the foreigner, who is one arriving with a name and from a particular place, and the barbarian, the absolutely unknown and exterior other; see also *Of Hospitality* 25, 73.

family, a familial or ethnic group receiving a familial or ethnic group” (ibid. 23). To be given access the hospitality of the state, even its inhospitality, one must assume a bodily lineage always exceeded by the barbarian.

Thus it is that, though many individual “barbarians” turn up in Coetzee’s novel, the barbarians that have been anticipated from the opening pages are still being awaited in the closing ones. The barbarian, properly speaking, cannot arrive. The barbarian cannot become present before the law, because the alterity of the barbarian is beyond legal conceptualization; this is what makes it barbaric. The state attempts to lay claim to the barbarian as a category of bodies and to allots to it racialized characteristics, racing the body of the colonized other as barbaric. In this effort to territorialize those that empire thinks as wholly outside itself, it can never succeed; empire can only terrorize and overinscribe the individual bodies that do turn up. As the magistrate discovers, “the barbarians exceed the terms, categories and definitions in which the Empire is trying to enclose them” (Craps 63). For this reason, although claims of barbarism always take the shape of racial hierarchies, as Mignolo describes, these claims also signal the state’s recognition of something utterly beyond itself. Recalling as well the essential nonipseity of sovereign power, the state’s recognition of the barbaric is also a recognition of something lurking within itself, as Coetzee’s magistrate eventually realizes, watching the actions of “the new barbarians” in the empire’s employ (91). The undeterminedness of the barbarian therefore adds a new openness to the political possibilities of attacking racialized sovereignty; the insufficiency of the barbaric as grounds for capturing the other (and the self) asserts the ongoing presence of the unknown otherness constitutive of sovereignty, and of what might lie beyond and within it. This is not an easy resolution, nor does it displace responsibility to some externality with which we will never need to grapple. We must think instead both how the state

barbarizes those racialized others who live with us and who we may be, and how that violence can be responded to by rethinking how we make our homeland a home for people already here and those to come.

The apprehension of barbaric difference pushes us to grapple with our responsibility to an other that is wholly inappropriable. Derek Attridge has parsed this by saying that “Responsibility for the other is a form of hospitality and generosity” (126). What I want to hold here is the embodied trouble of this responsibility. “[I]n responsibility I respond with much more than my cognitive faculties: my emotional and sometimes my physical self are also at stake. Hence...the risk implicit in any act of hospitality—I am obliged to affirm something with all that I am before I know what it is,” Attridge writes (126). This is a responsibility we become oriented to by literature; it is, Attridge says, what makes us readers (126). We should reject, however, any easy reconciliation that might arise from this perspective. Certainly, we should read with open minds, but it should not be pretended that reading itself will make us more just citizens. Nor should the risk involved in an ethics of hospitality be understated: we need to be prepared to die if we are to carry this out, and prepared to lose the affordances of privileges that are racial, economic, and national.

Each of the three novels read in this chapter further posit a responsibility to the other in all its heterogeneity. The plural machinery of sovereign oppression in racism and imperialism, with its othering and claims of barbarism, makes present the very limits of the socio-political order that are present throughout modernity. Becoming cognizant of these limits and who and how they impact others shows where and how to open upon something new. As Freire writes, the oppressed “must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no

exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (49). It is our responsibility to change the world with the other, to make it hospitable.

Such responsibility, as Attridge writes, “may often look like irresponsibility” (126). We might think again here of the Irigarayan indifference discussed in the previous chapter, the willful misrecognition and subversion of the limits of the world as set forth by and for Man. Or, to take a more recent example, we might think of the “idiotism” or “profanation” that Byung-Chul Han has offered as potential means of resistance to the ongoing mechanisms of dominance as they have metastasized in our contemporary neoliberal moment. Such practices involve “adopting an *attitude of conscious negligence*” that “represents a *practice of freedom*” (*Psychopolitics* 53).⁹⁵ Reading Coetzee’s novel as a postmodern, (post)colonial mutation of the sovereign ordering enacted through racist othering in the era of modernism and throughout modernity suggests barbarism itself as a means of combating ongoing political and economic dominance. This is a case that Andrew Culp has made, arguing that “The nomads that will dissolve capitalism are not cowboys but barbarians” (54). This dissolution is possible because “barbarians have two defining characteristics: they refuse to be educated in the language of the *polis* and they act with a savage roughness that exceeds the boundaries of appropriateness” (54). Barbarians therefore fall within “the uncivilized realm of beasts....[B]arbarians avoid the liberal trap of tolerance, compassion, and respect” (55)⁹⁶; their presence upsets any *law* of responsibility and hospitality and forces consideration of a response to an other that can never be legally circumscribed.

⁹⁵ Han is speaking here of profanation in particular, though he later writes that idiotism also “represents a practice of freedom” (*Psychopolitics* 83). The standpoint of the idiot presents a special philosophical-political-ethical force because “Only the idiot has access to the *wholly Other*” (ibid. 81).

⁹⁶ Culp works here from Crisso and Odoteo’s *Barbarians: The Disordered Insurgence* and Anthony Padgen’s *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*.

This beast, the barbarian other that prowls the borders of the sovereign's ordered world and shatters its oppressive peace, raises the specter of a new world that would allow for a hospitality to this other, in the negotiation of the kind of a political community described by Craps. Such a community would be one that is democratic and just in pluralized, Derridean terms, always exceeding itself in the practice of questioning and responsibility that destabilizes the political as a calcified state. Cheah writes, in a reading of Derrida's thought on democracy, that "as the movement of sharing that breaks apart sovereign limitations and conditions, democracy entails in its negative aspect a questioning of the nation form and all other closed forms of community, and in its affirmative aspect an unconditional hospitality as the basis of worldhood" ("The Untimely Secret" 89). Any "creation of the world," in Nancy's terms, must in this sense be based in an irresponsible welcoming of the other that willfully destroys its own political grounding. As Nancy says in closing *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, "The only task of justice is...to create a world tirelessly, the space of an unappeasable and always unsettled sovereignty of meaning" (112). Sovereignty, and the known world, must constantly usher in their own destruction if any justice and democracy are to be possible.

Waiting for the Barbarians gestures toward a political practice of this kind, one that reworlds the world by first recognizing the limits it places on other bodies, and then questioning what a responsibility that goes beyond that would look like. Mignolo has put the issue in similar terms where he notes that "The explosions coming out of the theoretical, political, and ethical awareness of the *colonial wound* make possible the imagination and construction of an-other world, a world in which many worlds are possible" (*The Idea of Latin America* 156). As Larsen and Wright make clear, however, such a responsibility toward ethical creation is made present not only in our engagement with the oppressive worlds of imperialism in the classical sense, but

also in the racial and racist overdeterminations by sovereign power at work within the West itself. Cognizance of biopower's multitudinous mechanisms of dominance—through ontological, epistemological, and existential threats of necropower, death-worlds, binding by death, othering, overdetermination, as well as ideological processes like economic and spatial bounding—brings forcibly to presence the limiting, unjust structures of our inhospitable world. This is what Weheliye calls attention to in describing “the very real likelihood that another world might not only be possible but that this universe may already be here in the NOW” (132); bodies relegated to less-than-sovereign, less-than-human positions, which have suffered impossible expanses of death and subjugation through biopower, already carry within them an infinite possibility of political justice that hospitality opens us to. This opening can only take place at our own peril.

In the final chapter of this project, I theorize in greater detail the practices and possibilities of world-making that hold the capacity to bring about justice and democracy “in the NOW,” as Weheliye writes. Having in this and the two preceding chapters begun to undertake a small part of the task of revealing the numerous different ways in which biopower has affected and continues to affect different bodies in modernity—through examinations of species, gender, and race as mechanisms of crafting and maintaining the sovereign exception—I look in this last chapter toward creative practices that might birth new and different worlds. To this purpose, I read some of W. B. Yeats' late work alongside Wole Soyinka's play *Death and the King's Horseman*, examining the ways in which these authors negotiate death, birth, and the world in visions of possibility that gesture toward an outside to modern dominance. The result is a sliver of a beginning to the project that remains urgently necessary to biopolitical analysis: recognition of the heterogeneity of embodied experience within biopower, and a praxis for remaking this

power and its formations of sovereignty in ways and worlds that are democratic, just, and always in question.

Chapter 4

Modern Natality: On Birth of Body and World

*Gone, and except for horsemen briefly
Thawed, lit in deep cloud mirrors, lost
The skymen of Void's regenerate Wastes
Striding vast across
My still inchoate earth*

-Wole Soyinka, "Deluge . . ." (67)

Hospitality, the unconditional welcoming of the unknown, opens the possibility for a rebirth of self and world. Ushering the other within home and life hospitably means putting ourselves at risk and allowing us to be changed by the new arrival, who cannot simply be assimilated. JanMohamed has written that *Native Son*, despite its preoccupation with death, also posits a potential for rebirth: "the 'rebirth' involved in Bigger's symbolic-death is constituted not by a sociopolitically concrete alternative life, but by his gradually developing comprehension of life as a potentiality not confined and determined by the structure of social-death" (116). Rebirth, in these terms, means appreciating the contingency of social-death's oppressive power and making way for its alternatives. While social-death—the insidious, constant, racist threat of death that coerces Black life in *Native Son*—is constitutive of African American life in the United States, social-death does not therefore represent the whole of life's possibility. New life has the potential to emerge in a manner very different from the way in which Bigger's life plays out. JanMohamed continues: "'Rebirth' in *Native Son* consists of the conceptualization of the preconditions of an actual rebirth or of the abstract potentiality of a new life" (116). What would

a new embodied life look like which was from the outset cognizant of the constructedness of the political limits placed upon it? In this closing chapter, I look toward rebirth, creation, and worlding as models for reengaging the possibility and alterity of the world. With the previous chapter's discussion of hospitality in mind, I move here to consider how the unknown, unborn, radically other to our world posits the contingency to that world and makes a way for new worlds. Creating new worlds does not free us from prejudice, racism, and forced death—at least not quickly or easily—but it does effect the reallocation of sovereignty in a collaborative practice of ongoingness that makes possible a movement along the path of equity and justice.

In what follows, I reexamine well-trod ground of biopolitical and proto-biopolitical thought concerning birth, rebirth, and natality, by pairing this discourse with the concepts of sovereignty and world that I have developed to this point. I do so through readings of W. B. Yeats' poetry—especially from *The Tower*—and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. These authors—who have previously been discussed in connection, though to my mind insufficiently—are preoccupied with birth and death, and with creation and struggles for sovereignty: though not part of *The Tower*, Yeats' "Easter, 1916" famously dwells on the violence, terror, and imperial oppression by which "A terrible beauty is born," a bodily struggle for sovereign independence thought through natality (180).⁹⁷ *The Tower* at large meditates upon the power of the aging body and its endurance and power, and here I read the sequence, particularly the poem that gives it its title, as an architecture of sovereignty that illuminates the possibility of life otherwise. This is a question of birth and rebirth, one also touched on by other poems in the sequence such as "Fragments," as Richard Finneran has noted (45). As Soyinka

⁹⁷ But not only through natality; as Joseph Valente tells us, "Easter, 1916" evokes a nationalist Irish response to British colonialism which pushed "to rehabilitate from the degenerative consequences of colonial domination an Irish body politic often imagined in terms of actual infirm bodies" (70).

writes in his poem “Deluge . . .” the coming into being of the “still inchoate earth” and the world involves creation and loss; it involves gazing into the “Void’s regenerate Wastes,” and, quite literally in the discussion that follows, it involves horsemen, the bodies of those who haunt the trails of lost sovereigns, themselves becoming lost (67).

Death and the King’s Horseman is occupied with the anxiety of crossing from the world of life into that of death, an anxiety that Elesin Oba, the eponymous horseman, must confront if he is to fulfill his ritual duty upon the King’s death. It also plays out the confusion of two cultural worlds which—to allude to Soyinka’s frequently-quoted “Author’s Note”—do not “clash” but are already entangled in one-another, in a process of “transition” toward unknown possibility (5, 6). Ryan Topper contends that through this process Soyinka “rewrit[es] what at first glance appears to be the death of the Yoruba world under the pressures of modernity into its survival” (57). Elesin’s struggle is one with the sovereign power and rights of the deceased Yoruba King, a struggle that takes place against the backdrop of the machinations of British colonial forces, themselves struggling to assert the sovereign dominance of imperialist power over Nigeria. This story of death and dying turns in its closing to birth and life to come, asking that we “forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn” (76). I make this turn below by developing the growing biopolitical conversation around *Death and the King’s Horseman* via natality and hospitality, which I do so by centering the play’s unborn life as a key regenerative externality. In this way, the play offers an ethical response to oppression and eradication of life, and forges a path for rethinking major biopolitical concepts.

Yeats and Soyinka together point toward both the anxieties and possibilities of natality, toward the ambivalent potential of creating new political realities and of hospitality to what new life might be ushered within formations of power, rebirthing those formations in the process.

They point, therefore, to worlding. Though the two have been critically linked before, no one has so far done so from a biopolitical perspective. Tanure Ojaide, in a 1988 study on Soyinka's influences, noted the resemblances between the Nigerian author's work and that of Western modernists like Yeats and Pound, remarking especially upon the divergences between Soyinka's and Yeats' thoughts on violence and an instance in which Soyinka quotes Yeats on the topic (773). More recently, Chii Akporji has described at length the intersections between Yeats' dramatic compositions and Soyinka's, and Mayowa Akinlotan has used the supernatural as a lens through which to view their writing in tandem and the ways in which it reflects Irish and Nigerian supernatural discourse. In an essay that inspired the early direction of this chapter, Edward Said draws Soyinka in passing into a conversation on Yeats, nationalism, decolonization, and nativism.⁹⁸ Said argues that Yeats' "greatest decolonizing works quite literally conceive of the birth of violence, or the violent birth of change, as in 'Leda and the Swan,' instants at which there is a blinding flash of simultaneity presented to his colonial eyes" (90). But despite fixating on the power of birth in Yeats, Said does not return in this essay to Soyinka, whose *Death and the King's Horseman* is likewise concerned with real births and with the violence of change wrought by imperialism and its resistance.⁹⁹ Here I explore this connection, while also demonstrating how Yeats and Soyinka can be mobilized to reconfigure biopolitical thought on birth and natality. The biopolitical framework of natality is still open to being re-thought, and Yeats and Soyinka's work urges that we do so, and that we continue to think through global responses to modernizing power in new ways.

⁹⁸ "[I]t is the first principle of imperialism that there is clear-cut and absolute hierarchical distinction between ruler and ruled. Nativism, alas, reinforces the distinction.... And it has often led to compelling but often demagogic assertions about a native past.... One sees the drive backward in such enterprises as Senghor's *négritude*, or in Soyinka's explorations of the African past" (82).

⁹⁹ These themes are not isolated to Soyinka's play, but come up in his poetry as well. His volume *Idanre*, for example, features a section titled "Of Birth and Death"; see *Selected Poems*, 21-33.

There is much to be gained by considering Yeats and Soyinka in tandem from a modernist studies perspective, and not by subsuming Soyinka within the transatlantic canon. As with the other heterogeneous groupings in this dissertation (especially Lawrence/Rhys and Larsen/Wright/Coetzee), I take my cue from scholars of new modernism like Susan Stanford Friedman, who “suggest[s] we regard modernism in its different geohistorical locations and periods as a powerful domain *within* a particular modernity, not something outside of it, caused by it, or responding belatedly to it”; in this sense, “Every modernity has its distinctive modernism” (475). This does not mean that modernism extends from the early modern period to the contemporary era in any way that we can take for granted. Rather, every modernity generates a unique aesthetic response, each of which is wildly different and must be analyzed in its particular context.

From this perspective Soyinka’s play might be viewed as a response to one of the “postcolonial modernities of Africa after 1960” (Friedman 480)—a reassessment of the conditions by which a colonial modernity arose in Nigeria before the time of its independence. Viewed from this angle, the play looks back upon Nigeria’s colonial era from a 1970s perspective, reframing Yoruba tradition in a way not formally dissimilar from how Euro-American modernists reclaimed mythological and historical perspectives. What makes this historical move much different from the new mythologies of modernism, however, are the intervening decades of colonialism and coloniality at work in Nigeria during the period of British rule, independence in 1960, and years of civil war and militarized violence. Soyinka’s play therefore responds to the period of coloniality that followed legal decolonization by revisiting key scenes of colonial subjugation and cosmological possibility, in a way that reimagines the

colonial relationship through the lens of the coloniality that has followed, and not by some kind of “return to origins.”

The play shares a general project with the diverse responses of Euro/American modernism to modernity, even an aesthetic intersection, without being in any way derivative of them. Scholars have read the work as one eminently concerned with modernism, whether modernism as modernization (Etop Akwang), as artistic project (Topper 72), or as political instrument (Jahan Ramazani).¹⁰⁰ It has also been read as a work of postmodernism (Omigbule and Mwaifuge). What new modernist approaches like Friedman’s assert, however, is that works originating from outside of the locations and timeframes of canonical modernism (whatever that is) need not and should not be shoehorned within any particular aesthetic or temporal trajectory that originates from within that western perspective (assuming, again, that there is such a general perspective). *Death and the King’s Horseman* responds uniquely to the unique conditions of modernity present in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. Reading it in conjunction with a “canonized” modernist like Yeats presents a more nuanced and textured understanding of global responses to modernity, particularly here regarding how sovereignty positions modern bodies and worlds.

I. Worlds in Strife, Striving

Soyinka’s play is a text of worlds in strife. It relates the story—based on historical events of 1946 (5)—of the indigenous Nigerian people of the Yoruba city of Oyo and of their king’s horseman Elesin, who is required by custom to commit ritual suicide following the recent death of the king, so that Elesin can safely “accompany him to heaven” (28). Elesin, however, is not

¹⁰⁰ Ramazani writes that Soyinka, like Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo, “seized on Euromodernism as a tool of liberation” (447).

able to fulfill his duty, which throws his community into chaos. Intersecting this drama are the goings on and eventual intervention of the English colonial government and local District Officer Simon Pilkings, who attempts to ensure that the custom will not be carried out. As Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze puts it, “The drama in the play is precisely about a metaphysical order that was put into question when a colonial authority intervenes to prevent a ritual process that it understood as murder,” a metaphysical order that also carries a politics (31). Further complicating the situation is the arrival of Elesin’s son Olunde, who had been studying medicine in England. With Elesin imprisoned by Pilkings in the hopes of thwarting the completion of Elesin’s self-sacrifice, Olunde steps in to take his place, taking his own life in an attempt to restore the balance that Elesin’s hesitancy and Pilkings’ meddling had threatened. The play closes with Elesin too killing himself in desperation, leaving behind the pregnant Bride and Iyaloja, the “‘Mother’ of the market,” to repair the community (8).

The play thrusts into interplay worlds phenomenological, social, and cultural, along with the void that threatens the precarious existence of each. In the opening scene, Elesin and a company of women, praise-singers, and drummers, caught up in the ritual proceedings, are occupied with the state of the world he will be leaving, and with the anxiety—and necessity—of him making his departure. As Elesin’s primary Praise-Singer wonders by way of encouragement: “there is only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world leaves its course and smashes on boulders of the great void, whose world will give us shelter?” (11). “The world was mine” (15), Elesin muses, and the Women remind him soon thereafter that “The world is in your hands” (18). Elesin’s failure to complete his task, however, results in precisely the tragic destruction that the Praise-Singer foreshadows. The Praise-Singer reviews events with the play drawing to a close: “Elesin, we placed the reins of the world in your hands yet you watched it plunge over the edge

of the bitter precipice. You sat with folded arms while evil strangers tilted the world from its course and crashed it beyond the edge of emptiness” (75). “Our world is tumbling in the void of strangers” (75), the Praise-Singer tells Elesin just before Elesin takes his own life.

This is a world of autochthonous tradition in strife with a European world of economic moralizing. It is quite clear that Elesin and Pilkings have different worlds in mind when Pilkings argues that “It is still a good bargain if the world should lose one night’s sleep as the price of saving a man’s life” (62). Eugene McNulty articulates this strife in terms of temporal worlds:

Soyinka’s explication of the temporality of the Yoruba worldview is more properly read as a resistance to, and/or rejection of, the implicit narrative of progress and development that underpins the modernist (Eurocentric) drive of such anthropological projects. What is at stake is the coherence of a world articulated through, and structured by, this ordered division of time as it maps out the relationship between ways of living and ways of dying. (7)

Any conception here of *strife* as classically dialectical, however, is precluded by the irresolvable entanglements of cultures which cannot be encountered as wholly individuated. McNulty’s biopolitical analysis leads to a conclusion that, in his exceptional position with regard to the play’s numerous thresholds, particularly at its end, “Elesin may...be read as describing the process of being made ‘bare life’” (12). While this seems plausible, it hardly accounts for the renewing aspects of the play, as in its conclusion in the unborn. (Far more convincing is Topper’s argument that “The sacrifice of sacrifice staged thus becomes sacrificially regenerative” [73].) Biopolitics is obviously a western conceptualization of the political, and any broader exploration thereof must remain mindful of possible Eurocentrism. However, the western power structures that biopolitics identifies are hardly independent of global enactments

of power, despite the elision of these in major currents of biopolitical thought. As Scott Morgensen argues, recognition of colonial experiences forces an entirely different approach to biopolitics, not its abandonment. What is yet missing with regards to such a biopolitical perspective on Soyinka's play is an account of how its bodies and worlds come into being together, doing so in a way that possesses an ambivalent capacity for oppression and/or the wholly new, rather than the cyclical.

The machineries of these worlds and the movement and organization of bodies through them elicit eminently biopolitical concerns of life's regulation and preservation. Asha Varadharajan and Timothy Wyman-McCarthy remark that, "Using the Yoruba worldview and idiom as a way to show the continuing relevance of mythology as a legitimate temporal category, Soyinka dramatizes how a culture deeply immersed in the politics and metaphysics of life, death, and death-in-life responds to its own seeming destruction" (105). Varadharajan and Wyman-McCarthy (107, 108) refer also to Eze, who notes that in Soyinka's play:

What is put in question is the existential coming-to-form of a world itself. What is threatened is not one man's or woman's farm, a day's work, or a day's joy: it is the very construction of a sense of home on earth, no matter how transient, that has been forcibly rendered, however momentarily, ritually impossible. (31)

This should conjure a sense of the hospitality and home-making discussed in the previous chapter. The play stakes out again the value of those linguistic and cosmological grounds elided by imperialist violence and coloniality, but it doing so it re-dramatizes their thwarted capacity to form a local world. Soyinka's play is a locus for the intersection of life, death, world, and the political within a colonial context and indigenous perspective that reinforces the global relevance of biopolitical thought while also taxing it to make a renewed commitment to addressing the

specificity of experience under colonial biopower. The worlds of Yoruba myth and western thought cannot arrive at any satisfactory sublation; likewise the experience of “death-in-life” in the play remains both a cultural condition of Yoruba life and an imperial imposition.¹⁰¹ The “death” of Soyinka’s title points to the death of the sovereign and the duty of death for Elesin as much as it does the external threat of death that haunts the colonized. As such, *Death and the King’s Horseman* offers and requires new strategies for worlding and for the sovereign “construction of a sense of home on earth” in the multifaceted face of death.

II. Birth/Nativity: The Biopolitical Genealogy

Birth enters the biopolitical register under the purview of two distinct but intertwined frameworks. It enters literally as natality and birth rates, as a quantifying strategy by which the state surveils and regulates the lives of its population. As such it is one of the primary and most obvious mechanisms by which biopower operates: “What does this new technology of power, this biopolitics, this biopower that is beginning to establish itself, involve?... [A] set of processes such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population, and so on” (Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*” 243). To manage itself biopolitically, the state must become cognizant of its population as a set of the living and dying, the coming to life, the replenishing of people (and from where), and the rates at which each is taking place. This is a primary step from which the state can then move to further investigate, care for, manipulate, and take advantage of its human composition. As Jemima Repo has pointed out, questions of natality and biopower are never far from questions of race, gender, and sexuality; as population increasingly comes into view in the twentieth century as itself a body requiring management, a

¹⁰¹ This force of death is comparable to, but obviously not interchangeable with, Black US experience as described in my previous chapter.

variety of strategies for undertaking this emerge: “The need not only to regulate population numbers but also their racial purity and well-being was at the heart of neo-Malthusian, eugenicist, and pro-natalist thinking” (*Biopolitics of Gender* 108). These are global strategies we still live with today: restrictive abortion rights, variable allowances for maternal/paternal leave, uneven access to birth control and medical care and life-saving medicines, resource extraction—all colored differently by the local histories of imperialism and colonialism and slavery that are entangled with our present conditions of governance.

But birth and natality also enter biopolitical discourse via an understanding that precedes Foucault’s, by way of Hannah Arendt’s retroactive inclusion as a biopolitical thinker. In her 1958 work *The Human Condition*, Arendt proposes the concept of the *vita activa*, an umbrella term she uses to cover “three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action” (7). The first, labor, “is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body.... The human condition of labor is life itself” (7). Labor comports with work—by which human beings create things and thereby “worldliness”—and action—the unmediated relations between human beings which “corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (7). “All three activities,” Arendt continues, “and their corresponding conditions are intimately connected with the most general condition of human existence: birth and death, natality and mortality” (8). Focusing on action, which of the three she links most intimately with natality, Arendt notes that “the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting” (9). She concludes, finally, that “since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought” (9). Arendt therefore entangles the labor

that perpetuates life (like the labor of the mother) with the work that produces the world and the action that brings human beings into relation with one-another. The result is an affirmative biopolitics that asserts the power and predominance of life/the bio in the realm of the political—as opposed to death/the necro in my previous chapter—as the stage for the creation of new life, new action, new world.

More recent biopolitical thinkers have revisited and revised Arendt's thought. Agamben, for example, discusses Arendt's approach to rights alongside the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in *Homo Sacer*. He remarks here upon the discord between the sovereign rights purportedly allotted to any modern human body merely by virtue of its birth, and the de facto allocation of rights through citizenship (127-8). "The nation—the term derives etymologically from *nascere* (to be born)—thus closes the open circle of man's birth" (128). That is, "Rights are attributed to man (or originate in him) solely to the extent that man is the immediately vanishing ground (who must never come to light as such) of the citizen" (128). The modern discourse of rights, Agamben contends, rests upon the false pretense "that *birth* immediately becomes *nation*" (128); there is instead a gap here, asserts Agamben, one that Arendt never satisfactorily addresses, by which the nation hoards the right to give rights. Rather than allotting rights immediately, unconditionally, *hospitably*, to the newcomer, the nation as sovereign site doles out sovereign privilege unequally. In Agambenian terms, birth and the arrival of the other therefore have the potential to expose a lack in the nation's sovereign power—a gap that is not supposed to exist—by way of which this power's uneven distribution can come to light and be acted upon. This complicates Arendt's notion of action as an innate, given force for political activity that arrives conterminously with the arrival of a new body. As

I've noted in previous chapters, however, Agamben himself fails to take full advantage of these insights by articulating the irregular and oppressive plural orientations of sovereign power.

Read alongside developments in deconstruction and biopolitical thought, Arendt's notion of natality provides a conceptual framework by which the (re)birth of the world can be thought. This framing of natality, however, is problematic—in what ways, we may for instance be inclined to ask, might the privileging of natality essentialize a gendered (political) position?¹⁰² Or: is the leap from literal birth rates as apparatus of biopower to the metaphorical duo birth/creation as resistance a tenable one? It is not my aim here to resolve all tensions of this kind. Rather, natality offers ground that is both unmistakably embodied and metaphorical for the rethinking of hospitality and worlding. It does so by illuminating the entanglement of the following: 1. overseeing and manipulating birth—its statistics, medicalization, encouragement, and prevention—has been and continues to be an essential aspect of biopower. 2. birth is creation (of life), and the reverse—creation is birth (of life)—has frequently been contended as well. 3. if The World has ended, then it must be created, which entails: 4. new life must be made that exceeds biopower and the death of the world. Numbers 1 and 2 I have briefly discussed already. The continued relevance of number 1 is obvious, and is evidenced by the numerous daily struggles for women's rights for available abortion services, historical and ongoing battles against forced sterilization especially of indigenous populations, and continuing debates about overpopulation and population control.¹⁰³ Each of these are biopolitical concerns; they involve

¹⁰² On the other hand, might the ineradicable gendering of mothering and birthing present opportunities for reappropriating the ethical and political implications of natality as it is and must be (?) located within women's bodies? This is the question taken up by Irina Aristarkhova in "Hospitality and the Maternal." For a more direct critique of Arendtian natality, see Söderbäck.

¹⁰³ See, respectively, Tavernise for an early overview, Longman, Cumming.

legislation, regulation, and invasion of embodied life by the state and its deployments of sovereignty.

It's first worthwhile here to note the conceptual link between birth, death, and world, especially by taking a look at how Arendt's concept might be read alongside deconstructive endeavors to uncover modes of creating the world. For Nancy, "There is no longer any world: no longer a *mundus*, a *cosmos*, a composed and complete order (from) within which one might find a place, a dwelling, and the elements of an orientation" (*The Sense of the World* 4). The loss of the world as the secure container of the known therefore necessitates its creation—its birth—*ex nihilo*, as I discuss in Chapter 2. Derrida's "Rams," on the other hand, offers a sustained reading of Paul Celan's poem "Grosse, Glühende Wölbung" ("Great, Glowing Vault"), which ends with the line "Die Welt is fort, ich muß dich tragen" (Celan 96)—"The world is gone, I have to carry you" (97).¹⁰⁴ There is a great deal that Derrida says in "Rams" that is relevant to the arguments of this project, but I restrict myself here to the way in which he suggests a link between the response to the loss of the world, and pregnancy and birth. He notes, first of all, that "*Tragen*, in everyday usage, also refers to the experience of *carrying* a child prior to its birth," a "shared solitude between one and two bodies" in which "the world disappears" (159). "This poem," Derrida remarks by way of summation, "says the world, the origin and the history of the world, the archeology and eschatology of the concept, the very *conception* of the world: how the world was *conceived*, how it is born and straightaway is no longer, how it goes away and leaves us, how its end is announced" (162). The world is carried and created and comes to be in and between life and bodies and, in this relationship, it also disappears. We must recreate the world again and again with the other we carry with(in) us. Again and again we must make and lose the

¹⁰⁴ Derrida also briefly discusses Celan's poem, especially this final line, on a few occasions in *The Beast & The Sovereign* volume 2; see pp. 9-10, 32, 104-5, 169-70, 176, 255-6, 258-60, 266-9.

world and make it to be lost and discovered with the other, with and from the pregnant nothing that is the possibility of the other's impossibility—the real way the undecidability of the other comes to affect our life.

And so there must be a new and different abundance of life (number 4), not in the sense of increased rates of procreation, but in that of new becomings and assemblings. Haraway writes that “Truly nothing is sterile; and that reality is a terrific danger, basic fact of life, and critter-making opportunity” (64). Natality as a worlding practice appears in this sense as a variation on Haraway's slogan “Make Kin Not Babies” (5-6)—create new formations of life *without* birth, in the literal sense, by birthing new formations of life in the world:

We must find ways to celebrate low birth rates and personal, intimate decisions to make flourishing and generous lives...without making more babies.... We need to encourage population and other policies that engage scary demographic issues by proliferating other-than-natal kin—including nonracist immigration, environmental and social support policies for new comers and ‘native-born’ alike (education, housing, health, gender and sexual creativity, agriculture, pedagogies for nurturing other-than-human critters, technologies and social innovations to keep older people healthy and productive, etc., etc.). (209n18)

This is a start, and one which may reopen the world to the strangeness of life through the strangeness of the stranger, a hospitality, a possibility, through a strange birth. This, to be sure, is not the natality that Arendt envisioned. Yet perhaps it can be a natality that revives an Arendtian political vision while also challenging the limitations of Arendt's formulation and the somewhat disembodied deconstructionist framings of birth and world.

III. Towering

Nativity involves impregnated bodies, creating bodies, carrying bodies, expelling and expelled bodies. And making kin involves entangling bodies and making bodies, making the assembled bodies that Haraway calls “*holobionts*” (60). Yeats’ “The Tower” is occupied (in the fully militaristic sense) by another kind of body, the body of the Man, the withering body, the impregnating body, the sovereign body:

What shall I do with this absurdity –
O heart, O troubled heart – this caricature,
Decrepit age that has been tied to me
As to a dog’s tail? (194)

The impossible disappearance of the power promised the body of the Male Artist, a mutation that evokes the absurd in its deviation from the course of embodied power. An unwanted characteristic superadded to the *impregna(ta)ble*, unchangeable body, which nevertheless perceives a creeping unhumanizing, a dog-ness, that it pushes off upon the canine appendage it lacks.¹⁰⁵ Yeats’ poem finds the artist surveying his realm, ordering his memories, making his testament, leaving his will. As David Dwan writes in his reading of the poem, “Yeats often seems to champion a type of subjectivism in which the private ego operates as the condition of all meaning” (234). “The Tower” presents a controlling, sovereign presence, but one not without its uncertainties. The poem meditates on coming death and dwindling control, but it never rescinds its guiding, self-contained power; rather it recasts it in a transcendent excess.

This transcending move begins in the first line. Before the source of anguish is known it is known as something ridiculous—“Decrepit age” is an “absurdity,” to be dealt with in a rather

¹⁰⁵ For an example reading of Yeats from an animal studies perspective that puts into question the integrity of the human category in the poet’s work, see Young.

careless, even playful manner, rather than a serious issue of concern.¹⁰⁶ George Bornstein observes that “the tone of the passage” that completes the first section of the poem “gives the lie to its overt claim that old age burdens and mocks the poet” (55). The narrator’s agency is not in question here: “What shall I do...” Nor is it when he “send[s] imagination forth” and expounds in apparent omnipotence upon the violent influence of a “Mrs. French,” the wide-ranging and not entirely happy impact on “A peasant girl commended by a song” sung by a blind man (195), the time he “created Hanrahan / And drove him drunk or sober through the dawn,” or centuries of “Rough men-at-arms” with their “images, in the Great Memory stored” (Yeats 196). Instead, the poem progresses as a tour of memories made, manipulated, and mostly retained, viewed through a dominant I that remains curious about forays beyond the bounds of its current form:

Old lecher with a love on every wind,
Bring up out of that deep considering mind
All that you have discovered in the grave,
For it is certain that you have
Reckoned up every unforeknown, unseeing
Plunge, lured by a softening eye,
Or by a touch or a sigh,
Into the labyrinth of another’s being. (197)

Here the narrator evidences an interest in a romantic deterritorialization—with “a woman won or woman lost” (197)—reliant upon a knowledge available only to he who has long *discarded* his body. The phallic penetrating threat of “The Tower” is scarcely more obvious anywhere in the

¹⁰⁶ But aging, like birth, is a serious realm of biopolitical concern: “To think about the production of age in the contemporary world is...to partake in a radical jumping of scales, from the most intimate spaces of the body to the large-scale spaces of capitalist accumulation and control” (Neilson 176).

poem than it is here, and this comes paired with a scopophilia and enduring mental acuity that disdains the transitory quality of its own corporeality.

The Tower, any tower, is a site of sovereignty. “Sovereignty designates, first, the summit.... The summit towers over and dominates” (Nancy, *The Creation of the World* 96). This is just as true in the literal sense of towering over necessary to a historical western sovereignty of castles and high ground as it is in the modern sense of a state’s “highest offices,” its embodied hierarchies, its upper and lower classes. “The highest dominates properly only according to the military sense indicated by the example of the ‘large tower’: from on high it is easier to survey and strike what is below” (ibid.). Yeats:

I pace upon the battlements and stare
On the foundations of a house, or where
Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth;
And send imagination forth. (194-5)

The narrator of “The Tower” is a general, issuing his imagination as a salvo upon an already-leveled home, upon the merest trace of a body (and a nonhuman one at that) daring to breach his domain. The predominance of mind and self and memory in Yeats over the somatic is entirely consistent with the disembodied, watching power of the sovereign, for “the sovereign rises above the body” (Nancy, *The Creation of the World* 96).

Yet despite the somewhat carefree and privileged perspective of the first two parts of “The Tower,” sovereignty’s towering does not allow for a utopic reprieve from life and the body. As Nancy points out—although he does not satisfactorily circle back here to what this implies and makes possible for bodies—“The Most High can only produce one thing: vertigo.... Vertigo is the affect of the summit” (*The Creation of the World* 97). The literal and metaphorical

structures that isolate sovereign bodies from the concerns of life lived by the masses always retain the possibility of insistently reminding these sovereigns of the inescapable presence and discomforts of their own bodies. Sovereign looking is the exercise of power that undermines that power. Again, this is the case both literally and metaphorically and in ways that render the two inextricable—the vertigo produced by gazing down from an uncomfortable height is not unlike the disconcerting sense one gets when confronted by the mass of suffering experienced by those who have been excluded from sovereignty on the basis of race, place, gender, sexuality, or class. While this may appear hypothetical, its outcomes are quite concrete and in no way utopic. One need only think of the attacks on the twin towers, focused upon sovereign sites of global capital that symbolized exclusion and dominance as much as they did connectivity and trade. The September 11 attacks forced a vertiginous affect upon the capitalist order that the buildings arose to represent and enact—both in the horrific deaths of their inhabitants, and in the order of political dominance that was obligated to confront the fact that the most treasured architectures of its sovereignty helped give birth to movements directly concerned with leveling them. The response of this order was predictably violent, and only further self-undermining and vengeful.

As Édouard Glissant has discussed however, the vertigo of towering also makes possible a new making, a kind of rebirth and re-envisioning. “On the other side of the bitter struggles against domination and for the liberation of the imagination,” he contends, “there opens up a multiply dispersed zone in which we are gripped by vertigo. But this is not the vertigo preceding apocalypse and Babel’s fall. It is the shiver of a beginning, confronted with extreme possibility. It is possible to build the Tower—in every language” (109). Read alongside Nancy,¹⁰⁷ Glissant’s perspective suggests that the vertigo experienced in self-undermining sovereign voyeurism poses

¹⁰⁷ For a compelling analysis of world and literature that brings Nancy and Glissant together with Karen Barad’s work, see Kaiser.

a generative challenge: that a pluralized sovereignty might take it upon itself to construct the monuments to its own endless diversity. Vertigo, then, becomes the embodied signal of the enduring presence of the other, a sign for an occasion for new creation. The vertigo that Yeats' narrator does not directly express plays out in a careening through the lives of others and the curiosity at the potential "Plunge... / Into the labyrinth of another's being" (197). It is this consideration that moves the poem into its third section, where the narrator makes his will and prepares his rebirth, a rebirth very much of the body but projected beyond affect:

Now shall I make my soul,
Compelling it to study
In a learned school
Till the wreck of body,
Slow decay of blood,
Testy delirium
Or dull decrepitude,
[...]
Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades;
Or a bird's sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades. (199-200)

The impending end to the narrator's current cycle of life impels remaking soul and body—a new beginning, as Glissant writes, newly learned. This is a natality that arises from a confrontation with both the alterity of the other and the alterity of death, by which the Tower—of Babel, as it

were, as much as any sovereignty monumentalizes a power enacted in a linguistic consolidation that marks and includes/excludes its others—gains its new inhabitant.

Birth here comes from death; death and life are inextricable and each is the distinct ground for the other. This is similarly the case for Yoruba cosmology as described by Soyinka; “The past, present, and future—the worlds of the dead, the living, and the yet-to-be-born—are so inextricably entwined that to deny the experience of one of them...is to render a complete appreciation of the others impossible,” Varadharajan and Wyman-McCarthy write of Soyinka’s framing in “The Fourth Stage” (111). “The Tower” looks beyond the dualism and mutual exclusion of life/death and both before and beyond the instantiation of this dualism in Man: “Death and life were not / Till man made up the whole, / ...being dead, we rise” (198). This entanglement of life and death, and the way in which birth arises from death in Yeats’ poem, is reminiscent of what Homi Bhabha has called the “natality/fatality dialectic” (Schulze-Engler et al. 711). In a discussion of refugee rights surrounding an Eritrean family, Bhabha elucidates this undecidable dialectic by explaining that “forced or not, that is the refugee condition...however bad it is, I can be something else” (711). Precarious life dwells always in the possibility of becoming, of becoming something new and being reborn, or of dying.¹⁰⁸ As the father of this family puts it, “‘we could be *dead* at any point’, rather than voicing the usual argument, ‘we could be *different* at any point’, or ‘we could save ourselves’” (711). This looming presence of a death always capable of introducing itself into the procedure of life and of superseding rebirth recalls as well Mbembe’s necropolitics, or JanMohamed’s “death-bound-subject.”

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Agamben on natality/nativity and the refugee: “The refugee must be considered for what he is: nothing less than a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state, from the birth-nation to the man-citizen link, and that thereby makes it possible to clear the way for a long-overdue renewal of categories in the service of a politics in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted, either in the state order or in the figure of human rights” (*Homo Sacer* 134).

Yet Bhabha also complicates the threat of death in a sacrificial/salvific logic that both centers the necessity of exclusion in refugee life and offers up a question of the becoming of the self in general: what do we cherish that must be born, which if it died could benefit our life?¹⁰⁹ This is an irresolvable dialectic by which birth and life must also bring about death, while death stands too as the condition for the flourishing of new life. “You have to lose your way in the lives or times of others,” Bhabha notes, “in other times and places – to find, once again, the broken and brave thread of your own thinking” (714-15). The confrontation with the other, any other, is a negotiation of the natality/fatality dialectic on our own scale, an experience of the possibility of creating new life, a creation that means death, that ends that other as other. This, per Derrida’s Celan, is precisely the experience of our world’s natality—we cherish the other, making the world together, and its making makes both die. On this point Yeats’ towering sovereign and the cosmology of *Death and the King’s Horseman* intersect. To read Yeats’ poem against the poet’s tendency for sovereign transcendence: the all-knowing poet’s death is necessary in “The Tower” as the condition for seeing life anew. And in Soyinka: the king’s horseman must die to preserve Yoruba life or he will risk the death of the people themselves. At play in both is the violence imposed on bodies by time and the terrorizing other, the un-inscribable whole of death/life, but also the life made possible in the care of the other, surfacing in “The Tower” as the will. What, then, does a sovereignty of care look like, one that embraces the living precarious bodies that Bhabha brings to the conversation while subverting the kind of privileged towering that remains key to Yeats’ poem?

¹⁰⁹ See the specific impetus Bhabha refers to for the natality/fatality dialectic on 714: “Without the aporia of the refugee mother who thinks ‘there is a child in my belly I must protect and nurture’ and at the same time says ‘I wish this child was not in my belly because then I could give a better life to the child that is standing next to me’, I would never have been able to conceive of the palimpsest of natality/fatality.”

IV. Tumbling

Set in counterpoint to the discussion surrounding Elesin's communal procession through the market in *Death and the King's Horseman* is the scene of the Pilkings' home. Noteworthy in this shift is the contrast in staging. Elesin's scene moves through a marketplace attending to its end-of-day rituals: stalls emptying, women carrying away their purchases, wares carefully packed up. Elesin's progress through this tableau is marked by drums, singing, and dancing (9). In the transition to the Pilkings' home we find ourselves on the secluded verandah, but here there is dancing and music as well: a tango drifts from a gramophone, as Simon Pilkings and his wife Jane dance together (23). Despite the common elements, the contrast in these scenes is stark. In the former, a community transitioning from commerce to a ritual of death and renewal, accompanied by live, spontaneous music. In the latter, preparation for a masquerade is soundtracked by a mechanized performance in isolation. More importantly, attending this masquerade will involve the Pilkings' decision to wear traditional local dress they've confiscated, as a kind of novelty. So we have one group attempting to carry out its local tradition, which will later be interrupted by the colonial government, and another group carrying out a kind of tradition of its own (if we can call a European masquerade by that name) that does so by both mocking and appropriating local custom. This, of course, is the classic logic of colonialism—erasing history, rewriting everything in its own image in an endeavor to create its own localized legitimacy (Memmi 52).

Simon and Jane's preparations are interrupted by local policeman Amusa, who notifies them of Elesin's intended suicide. In an endeavor to put a hold on the "barbaric custom," and to ensure that nothing interrupts their ball, Pilkings orders Amusa to pick up Elesin and detain him in the Pilkings' house (31). Amusa's intervention, however, does not go as planned. Frustrating

Amusa's attempts to arrest Elesin, the crowd of Yoruba peoples gains energy as the time for Elesin's death approaches, causing some at the masque to fear a riot, and prompting Pilkings to personally leave to capture Elesin. Just as Pilkings departs from the party, Olunde arrives. As he tells Jane of his experience in World War II—in a passage that recalls Coetzee's magistrate and the "catastrophe" of history (154)—"I was attached to hospitals all the time. Hordes of your wounded passed through those wards. I spoke to them. I spent long evenings by their bedside while they spoke terrible truths of the realities of that war. I know now how history is made" (54). The continuation of this imperial, systematic history of violence, consumption, and self-preservation is finally enacted upon Olunde, Elesin, and the Yoruba people, as Olunde dies to take his father's place, and Elesin, in his shame, commits suicide.

In the play's closing lines, Iyaloja, the 'Mother' of the market who has followed Elesin throughout the day's journey, turns to the Bride he had taken in his final hours, telling her to "forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn" (76). In this strife between the worlds of the colonized and the colonizer, a violent intermingling is played out, as an appropriative, adaptive imperialism attempts to absorb and nullify a way of life it deems "barbaric" (53), and a people it finds "savage" (55). With the Yoruba world cast into the void at the coincidence of intercession by colonial force and failure by Elesin to carry out his task, and with the vacuity of the colonial order exposed, there remains in the play's closing no political ground on which to stand. Instead, it becomes necessary to create a new world, to look to a world to come, represented in the newly consummated marriage.

Topper writes that the unborn child "carries the promise of a coming polis birthed through his or her father's unconsecrated death" (74). Yet to understand this promise as a "future" simply to be waited upon is to understate its radical arrival, nor should we underestimate

the variety of figures of rebirth that the play offers. Olunde's transnational life, for instance, his multiculturalism, links the language and knowledge of Nigeria with that of the west in ways that suggest the birth of a new, cosmopolitan body. But the play shows us the limits of this, as Olunde sacrifices himself in the place of his father, unable to carry forward Nigerian tradition in life in a world shaped by colonialism. Soyinka's description of a possible future in his essay "The Fourth Stage" complicates matters; he notes there that "the past is not a mystery and...although the future (the unborn) is yet unknown, it is not a mystery to the Yoruba but co-existent in present consciousness" (149). The future, that is to say, does not lie in wait at a particular threshold across which one will eventually stumble. Rather the unborn future inheres in the present, for those who know how to look for it. The possibility of a difference that exceeds and constitutes the present, haunts always our consciousness and our experience of the world.

As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth*, after the colonial encounter there is no longer an authentic state that can be returned to that exists outside of the imperial relationship.¹¹⁰ Accepting this, Fanon writes, makes way for the creation of new ways of knowing and being: "The colonized intellectual...who strives for cultural authenticity, must recognize that national truth is first and foremost the national reality. He must press on until he reaches that place of bubbling trepidation from which knowledge will emerge" (161). The reality of Soyinka's play is one of antagonism. The conclusion to *Death and the King's Horseman* is uncertain, but as Soyinka says, it is not a mystery. The future is truly a "place of bubbling trepidation," a "void of strangers," as Soyinka writes in the play (75). And yet we have in the present, in Yoruba philosophy and cosmology, consciousness of what a desirable possible future can look like, one of indigenous values and traditions that does not preclude cosmopolitanism. But I also think that

¹¹⁰ "Seeking to stick to tradition or reviving neglected traditions is not only going against history, but against one's people" (160).

Soyinka's play suggests the possibility of another future as well, a truly undecided future that grows out of the world we know. Trepidation and vertigo, again, are the affects of possibility suggested by Soyinka's text, and these too emerge in the forced and given dialectic in which death and birth are mingled.

The void or abyss has the capacity to be both the vision of impending nothingness, of destruction and collapse, and the opening onto the unknown that may be full of possibility and life. It elicits a kind of *wonder*, to call back to my discussion of Sara Ahmed in Chapter 2. A void is opened when the processes of tradition are violently wrenched from their course, as they are for the Yoruba community that Soyinka describes. Yet the simultaneous threat and promise of the void is itself present within the logic of the Yoruba tradition, a logic that dwells in its own natality/fatality dialectic—the void is the danger, and it is the source of life. It is both the place where dwells the possibility that the “world leaves its course and smashes on boulders” (11), and “the unknown” that Elesin must cast himself into in order to do his duty (21). The frequently cited words of Friedrich Hölderlin are appropriate here: “where danger is, grows / The saving power also” (qtd. in Heidegger 28). None of this, of course, is to say that colonial violence is therefore a necessary contribution to achieving a better world, or that Yoruba cosmology trades on the crisis-logic familiar to us in late-stage capitalism. Rather, faced with this violence, Yoruba cosmology responds with a vision of renewal that opposes it. And this cosmology envisions its lifeways by an engagement with the necessity of death, as Soyinka's title makes plain, which always contains that element of terror and loss that Elesin so struggles with. So there is destruction here, in that the tradition asks the king's horseman to die and this death can only bring about the loss of his world—yet this destruction in no way involves the destruction of Yoruba customs, language, and culture; it is their renewal.

Yoruba cosmology contains the unknown response to colonial violence, a violence that can never point toward new futures that are open and just, whose force never offers benevolent outcomes. As Elesin wrestles with the inconceivable creation he must bring about through his own death, he does so in terms of birth, and of world:

We cannot see

The still great womb of the world -

No man beholds his mother's womb -

Yet who denies it's there? Coiled

To the navel of the world is that

Endless cord that links us all

To the great origin. (18)

The Yoruba world is in the play a particular sociohistorical system with its own sets of rules and its own logic, and in this way it is partially known, or it at least presents itself to its inhabitants in a knowable way. This world remains in its fundamentals unknown—the “womb of the world” cannot be glimpsed, nor can “the great origin,” except by following the unfollowable path of the “Endless cord.” This world brings forth life and itself into knowledge—into the realm of the undeniable—without revealing itself. And so, even as the play ends with the world “tumbling in the void of strangers” (75), and ends with an excess of death, it ends too with “the unborn” (76). Despite, and because of, death: life.

As Iyaloja says of the unborn child to come, its birth portends something new and unknown: “It will be neither of this world nor of the next. Nor of the one behind us” (22). The child is a real body that will arrive, that will embody the admixture of a father's life given beyond life and the world, and a never-arriving vision of that world's inconceivable futurity, left

forever unborn as the play closes. To return to Arendt, world and birth are inextricable insofar as the tasks of life coalesce in the symbiotic perpetuation of both: “Labor and work, as well as action, are...rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers” (9). Pheng Cheah, reflecting on natality in Arendt, notes that “The world is existence with plural others.... [W]orldliness is grounded in natality because we have to enter into worldly existence through birth before we can be amid others” (*What Is a World?* 136). This is true, on its face, yet as I’ve discussed in this chapter the world is also *ungrounded* in natality, which promises life and world *to come*, which cannot be determined, the birth of which—recalling Celan—gifts us the world and removes it. Birth, both writ large and specifically in the child of the Bride to come, is the entanglement of life, creation, world, body, affect—all real, all felt, all uncertain. This is Glissant’s “shiver of a beginning, confronted with extreme possibility,” a felt change that portends radical difference (109). You (the other, the unknown, the undetermined) are arriving; I tremble at what our world will be, as it tumbles in the void.¹¹¹

Ephemeral as this conceptualization of natality is—this confrontation with an/the other that reveals and rescinds the world—it is necessary to remind ourselves that it remains couched in a logic of living and making bodies before the law. Questions of the lived apparatuses of sovereignty are very much at stake here, differently, in Soyinka and in Yeats. In “The Tower” there emerges a mythologizing artistry descending from its sovereign seat in a cataloguing of a people and of their myths. The poem’s “will” is a passing of its power to a local Irish population in a manner that thwarts the imposed dominance of England:

I choose upstanding men

¹¹¹ Cf. my brief treatment of trembling in Chapter 2, above, which draws upon Derrida’s meditation on this affect in *The Gift of Death*, esp. 54-9; “A secret always *makes* you tremble” (54).

...

They shall inherit my pride,
The pride of people that were
Bound neither to Cause nor to State,
Neither to slaves that were spat on,
Nor to the tyrants that spat. (198)

Death and the King's Horseman, on the other hand, is concerned with a king's death, with a sovereign who has gone away, and with who will accompany him. And it is concerned with what will come next—with what kind of governance might follow, if something equitable and democratic might have emerged from this moment. In a historical sense key to Soyinka's backward gaze into the Nigerian past, the play thinks how the political landscape that comes out of this colonial encounter will lead Nigeria into its independence, into the Biafran struggle for its independence and the ensuing civil war, and finally into a transition into a neoliberalizing extractive state. But both Soyinka and Yeats are occupied with (post)colonial sovereignty, with responding to an English power that intrudes and dictates and organizes life and bodies. Both, for this reason, turn to "the unborn," in ways wholly different and very similar.

V. Estranging

But what of the stranger? The threat of the stranger, the ignorance of the stranger, the imposition of the stranger—Soyinka's "evil strangers" and "void of strangers" (75). But also the specter of the stranger in each of the primary works examined in this dissertation? The English husband of Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*: "I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did" (93). Bigger's discomfort at entering a new

social world: “He would have to be careful here. There were so many strange things” (Wright 47). Bhabha: “cultural differences, and the anxiety associated with alterity, is now displaced onto the stranger as a *threat to life itself*” (708). To expand the terms ever so slightly, Haraway’s “new comers” (209n18), or Arendt’s “newcomers who are born into the world as strangers” (9). This is the stranger we welcome, the stranger not yet determined (as evil, as unloved, as threatening). Or, looking back to my previous chapter, Coetzee’s barbarian, and his stranger that we keep close, too close—“You and I are strangers—you even more than I” (12); visions of “a stranger; a visitor from strange parts now on her way home” (83). Where is the stranger’s home? What is strange breaks and differentiates, it is what is not-us, what articulates a certainty of separation riven in life and body and place. And yet the stranger is actually a far from certain negotiation and their strangeness is *actually* unclear; could it actually mark the trespass of other into self, in protestation? “Actually they were strangers. Strangers in their ways and means of living. Strangers in their desires and ambitions. Strangers even in their racial consciousness” (Larsen 62-3). Were they? How strange?

Or is the strange that which complicates and reconfigures our worlds as a symptom of the presence of the other? This is what Flush perceives when the unforeseen enters his perfectly real, perfectly known world: “sometimes the step on the stair did not pass the door; it stopped outside. The handle was seen to spin round; the door actually opened; somebody came in. Then how strangely the furniture changed its look! What extraordinary eddies of sound and smell were at once set in circulation!” (39). The other affects world and body, inextricably. And their strangeness is always a matter of legislation, of a human/nonhuman divide by which Flush (for example) is relegated to a closed world that makes possible the entry of every other as a radical reconfiguration of this world, and of the law that condemns or discards the stranger as a threat to

the body politic, or only a benign distraction. Pound recalls German finance minister Silvio Gesell, who “entered the Lindhauer government / which lasted rather less than 5 days / but was acquitted as an innocent stranger” (LXXIV.462; cf. Terrell 381). Strangeness as grounds for innocence, dismissal, benevolent ignorance. Law cannot account for the strange (but of course it always does).

Can a home be made with the stranger? A world? Tom and Lydia Brangwen:

There was a silence. They were such strangers.... she sat there, small and foreign and separate.... She was a strange, hostile, dominant thing.... She was the awful unknown.... She was now the transfigured, she was wonderful, beyond him.... it was torture to him, that he must give himself to her actively, participate in her, that he must meet and embrace and know her, who was other than himself.... he wanted to save himself.... Their coming together now, after two years of married life, was much more wonderful to them than it had been before. It was the entry into another circle of existence.... The new world was discovered.... When at last they had joined hands, the house was finished. (Lawrence 76-9)

The stranger here as the one who is familiar that we have become estranged from. The one positioned as an enemy, whose power is uncertain and mysterious and appears therefore to be overwhelming. Awful and awe-full, wonderful, inappropriable. The other who torments us by their reserve, their unwillingness to be assimilated, one into whom we are capable of losing ourselves, who we must be saved from. A new becoming together, a new world, a new home, with the other. Again, Eze notes above that Soyinka’s play is a work of making a world and building “a sense of home on earth”; the unborn stranger makes the future of such a home possible (31). Contra Rhys’ *Englishman*, the very estrangement of the stranger might be what

invites tenderness and home-making; or, for the magistrate of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the stranger might be a visitor whose home is, in fact, here. Seeing the stranger as an other, a real other, secret, unknown, full of life and promise, whose separateness is by no means a given, brings the stranger to life before the law in an unignorable way: “Every Other is a citizen and no longer a barbarian” (Glissant 190).

“[T]out autre est tout autre,” Derrida writes (*Gift of Death* 69); even “I is an other,” in the words of Arthur Rimbaud (113). “Why,” we might wonder with Coetzee’s magistrate, “are there only strangers around?” (113). We are strange to others, others are strange to us, we are strange to ourselves. Žižek frames this imaginary by stating that “Universality is a universality of ‘strangers,’ of individuals reduced to the abyss of impenetrability in relation not only to others but also to themselves” (*Refugees, Terror* 87). What response is available to this estrangement? Derrida offers a difficult suggestion, one that I concluded my previous chapter with—a “Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality *itself*,” which “opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whomever arrives as an absolutely foreign *visitor*, as a new *arrival*, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other” (Borradori 128-9). Such hospitality would consist in welcoming the stranger *before we can say who they are*, before they are a barbarian, a loved one we have become disconnected from, a foreigner (someone from somewhere), somebody we have identified and invited in.¹¹² This opening can only be a home-making; as with Tom and Lydia, negotiating the (coming) presence of the other always involves our place, where we live, the position in which we attempt to safely situate ourselves within the world. But this home-making is never finished and can never abide any limits, rather it is “as though the categorical imperative of hospitality commanded that we transgress all the laws...of

¹¹² Cf. *Of Hospitality* 25.

hospitality, namely, the conditions, the norms, the rights and the duties that are imposed on hosts and hostesses” (*Of Hospitality* 75, 77). And this too is a question of sovereignty and self-identity: “I want to be master at home (*ipse*” (ibid. 53). Being hospitable can only further throw into question the tenability of ipseity, an ipseity which, as I’ve discussed in previous chapters, is inextricable from sovereignty (or lack thereof).

But if all others are entirely other, and we are as well, and at the same time we must perceive a division between the foreigner and the unforeseeable, between the stranger I know and the stranger I don’t, how can we hospitably decide upon this uncertainty between the other and the wholly other? The answer, of course, is that we cannot. “An unconditional hospitality is, to be sure, practically impossible to live” (“Autoimmunity” 129). For this reason, the strange, the stranger, and estranging become essential to *negotiating* hospitality¹¹³—though absolute hospitality is never what can be negotiated, argued, set to terms, contracted. What is thought to be known may become strange; it may also become, comparatively, stranger; only what once appears as known can we become estranged from, but the strange as strange cherishes its unknowability, and one may think they know many strangers (or “foreigners”) as such. Estranging as an act, on the other hand, is not dissimilar from Shklovskian “defamiliarization,” “*ostranenie*,” “making strange” (Bogdanov 48). As with radical hospitality, which asks that we “give the new arrival all of one’s home and oneself, to give him or her one’s own, our own, without asking a name, or compensation” (*Of Hospitality* 77), Viktor Shklovsky writes of Tolstoy’s method of defamiliarization that the author “makes the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar object. He describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an

¹¹³ Gil Anidjar offers a helpful note on the difficulties posed by translating “L’*étranger*” in Derrida’s thought, and the resulting uncertainty of rendering the phrase as “the stranger,” “the foreigner,” etc.; see “Hostipitality” 362n9. Still 18: l’*étranger* “denotes a stranger *and* a foreigner.”

event as if it were happening for the first time” (16). Links between Shklovsky’s thinking and Derrida’s have been noted by Alexei Bogdanov, who “suggest[s] *defamiliarization* as an appropriate term for a description of deconstruction” (56). In light of this parallel, whereby the other comes before us preominally and strange, the aesthetic projects that make us aware of this other take on the hue of a modernist *ethics*. The work that stranges and estranges offers ground for practicing the impracticable hospitality that Derrida describes.

Hospitality “must await and expect itself to receive the stranger” (“Hostipitality” 360). But this *must* is itself complicated by the aporetic character of Derrida’s thought; what the deconstruction of an ethics of hospitality both brings into focus and obscures is our responsibility to the real bodies of others, a responsibility which necessitates that the other is preserved as wholly other, and that they are recognized and invited in. To become cognizant of my responsibility to the other, a responsibility which must retain its heterogeneity and specificity, I must become cognizant of the specificity of their embodied life. And so the litany I’ve given above of representations of the experiences of the strange and the stranger cannot ever remain simply aspects of a category, nor can they be satisfactorily distinguished from that agglomeration. The radical openness of hospitality is a beginning, but must be accompanied by a confrontation with (e.g.): the English occupation of Yoruba and its effect on the people of Oyo (Soyinka), the history of slavery and imperialism in the Caribbean (Rhys), the continued effects of US slavery and segregation (Wright, Larsen), sexism and masculine dominance (Rhys, Larsen, Woolf), anthropocentrism (Pound, Woolf) and the privileging of particular bodies as human, as more human, as proper—as I have attempted to come at from a different perspective in each reading in this dissertation. This confrontation takes place in narrative, in representation that makes sense of history. We must have both: narrative, meaning, sense, as well as openness,

uncertainty, risk. I want to keep this tension open, to maintain the reality of lived experience and representation, not to dissolve it into “otherness” and alterity—but also to keep it from calcifying, from becoming “authentic” and unadaptable and unapplicable and dead.

Bodies and worlds. The world always returns as what haunts bodies, is haunted by bodies, what must come apart and together when we others find ourselves estranged from one another, and exchange that estrangement with hospitality. Cheah writes of Derridean hospitality that “unconditional hospitality is exemplified by an other worldwideization (*altermondialisation*), the world as a universal community that is distinct from the integrating processes of capitalist globalization (*Globalisierung*)” (“The Untimely Secret” 90). This link between hospitality, worlds, and the bodies that flit in and out of deconstructionist discourse is paralleled in another of Yeats’ poems from *The Tower*, “Youth and Age”:

Much did I rage when young,
Being by the world oppressed,
But now with flattering tongue
It speeds the parting guest. (211)

A subject, an affect, an anger at a limited and limiting world. Recalling Nancy, capitalist globalization is precisely the will to capture, to account, to form that oppressive world, or rather un-world—a will that is never entirely successful, that leaves the door ajar for the other.¹¹⁴ The experience of time in the world, in “Youth and Age,” allows the other to slip inside, unannounced, only noticed upon leaving, this other who has been a guest, who has apparently been invited (to stay). The cynical tone of the third line, along with the urged haste of the fourth, suggest that perhaps this stay has not been entirely pleasurable. And what is the “It” of line four?

¹¹⁴ See e.g. *The Creation of the World* 36-7.

The tongue, restated? The hospitality of the tower of Babel surely concludes with the dismissal of the other on the basis of a tongue, a linguistic difference. Is it time, or the age of the title? Both institute a stay on one's hospitality, the "Oh, it's getting late [in life]," flattery, promises to host again soon.

The "It," the poem's other and its ipse, is each of time and tongue and not, as it is(n't) also the oppressive *world* to which the pronoun perhaps refers most "grammatically." This world, my world, which enraged me, which affected me, which imposed itself upon me, I have discovered—in the midst of a single sentence that spans a life—that the other has been let in this world and become a guest, this stranger who I find I must now turn away, this stranger estranged by tongue and time and world, who I did know, must have known, but never named. "But now" I do not feel that rage at the world with which I began. Now I must muster what meager hospitality I can recover for this stranger, this foreigner, who I found was in my world taking its time with me, mitigating my rage, estranging me from what was the world that constituted my oppression—my very *Being* "by the world oppressed." How can I stake my sovereignty over this world now, though I have called you my guest as you leave? How can I know my own body now, once you have come and relieved the rage constitutive of my youth, without my notice or permission? "From the point of view of the law, the guest, even when he is well received, is first of all a foreigner, he must remain a foreigner" (*Of Hospitality* 71, 73). Certainly the law never speeds its intruders with a confused flattery, and this same law cannot be legislated into an absolute hospitality. Only an embodied openness that risks sovereignty, that shares sovereignty, that risks affect, that recognizes bodies even as it continually misrecognizes them, can walk the path of hospitality.

VI. Last

There are many, many more things I want to write here. I want to say more of the body and of hospitality, the host, the home, the body as host and hosting the body, hospitivity,¹¹⁵ sovereignty, the violence of hospitality and of inhospitality, the sexuality of hospitality, the racism of hospitality and inhospitality. “The body is the first sphere of hospitality, before the home, the city, the nation state or the cosmos, and inhospitality is often narrativised as rape” (Still 22). Of the hospitality that Iyaloja sets forth, in and beyond blood: “Only the curses of the departed are to be feared. The claims of one whose foot is on the threshold of their abode surpasses even the claims of blood” (21). The undecidable ambivalence of hospitality which is also the undecidability of (the) world, an ambivalence, as Sean Weidman notes, that has formed an essential problematic for Yeats and for the Irish people: “throughout his oeuvre, hospitable spaces carry importance for Yeats, but so too does his insistence that hospitable spaces may become contested, troubled, or haunted in a destructive way that curtails otherwise fruitful offerings of hospitality” (1026).¹¹⁶

I would like to say more on the real bodies that emerge and are represented in the novels, poems, and play that I’ve examined throughout—a specificity that I urge, that is the core of my biopolitical intervention, and that I routinely find myself to have wandered from as I wade into philosophical concerns. But you cannot have one without the other, and the body and life are just what we stray from as soon as we think them. “Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world” (Freire 81). I cannot claim to have succeeded in this, but I have tried. I would like to write more of the void,

¹¹⁵ E.g. *Of Hospitality* 45.

¹¹⁶ Weidman contextualizes Yeatsian and Derridean hospitality with a wonderful history of hospitality in Irish culture; see esp. 1027-1031.

Soyinka's void, and the saving power that the other offers to me and my body—"I needed you as the abyss across which my body must be drawn," Elesin says to his new bride (65). The void that is (?) the body of the other, the saving void, that *draws* my body, that writes it, that extends it, or that makes me the saving power, the bridge for or across you for an other other. And what of the sexism lurking in Elesin's statement, its gendered subordination? It can never be only the masculine that is permitted to remain embodied, while the feminine is hollowed out.

There remains much more to be said, too, on natality, which has somewhat slipped from direct view in the latter portions of this chapter. First a reminder, however, that hospitality does not preclude natality, that in fact one is constitutive of the other: "hospitality, what belabors and concerns hospitality at its core...what works it like a labor, like a pregnancy...what settles in it...the enemy (*hostis*) as much as the *avenir*, intestine hostility, is indeed a contradictory conception...or a *contraception* of awaiting" ("Hostipitality" 359). And hospitality and natality move in a constellation of strangers, bodies, and worlds; "human life...rests on the fact of natality, through which the human world is constantly invaded by strangers, newcomers whose actions and reactions cannot be foreseen by those who are already there and are going to leave in a short while" (Arendt, *Between Past and Future* 61). Pregnancy and birth, of course, involve many bodies beyond those coming to being, as studies of motherhood such as Abigail Palko's explore, in which she "engage[s] with maternity both as the literal subject of study...and as the guiding theoretical concept, using the placenta as a controlling metaphor in theorizing the maternal imaginary" (2).¹¹⁷ Unremarked upon here as well is birth as origin, something Agamben has discussed in his recently translated work: "the origin is what commands and

¹¹⁷ Palko also notes the element of hospitality at play in questions of birth and motherhood, and the ways in which "a philosophical concept of hospitality is facilitated by maternal intentionality and action" (20). Palko refers here to Aristarkhova's work on the subject.

governs not only the birth, but also the growth, development, circulation, and transmission—in a word: the history—of that to which it has given origin” (*Creation and Anarchy* 52). Could this be “the great origin” that Elesin describes, to which all are bound (18)? The origin that makes the world and inheres in the life of the world, that “commands and governs” like a sovereign?

In each chapter of this dissertation I have traced embodied sovereignty through a different register of biopolitical analysis as it describes life in the world—that of the animal/beast/nonhuman in Chapter 1, of gender/sexuality/ipseity in Chapter 2, of race/racism/death in Chapter 3, and here of natality/birth. Each chapter turns toward a practice—distinct yet interwoven with the others—of an otherwise to the mode of biopolitical dominance that it describes. Chapter 1 fixates on *worlding* as an assembling of human and nonhuman spheres—which can no longer be pretended to maintain a separateness—as a means to undermining fascist racism; Chapter 2 on a feminist *indifference*, cognizant of the boundaries set upon life by sexism, the state, the law, and willfully ignorant of them; Chapter 3 on a hospitality that confrontation with racialized others and empire’s barbarians lays out the urgent stakes for. Here I again propose hospitality, hospitality to the stranger, but a strange hospitality, a hospitality that is itself estranged, impractical, impracticable. Each chapter involves an estranging of its own, an estranging from the humanity and self-identity of our own bodies, from the necessity of the world (what world?) and its limits, from our duty to the other as duty, from the conditions for the new. This is a modernist worlding—the worlds of modernist art, the world that is modernist thought, the reframing of modernism in modernity in its haunting of imperialism’s futures—but not a newness in the Poundian formulation. The “making new” cannot originate in the sovereign body of Man (*who?*). The making ~~new~~ different comes with the other. This is justice, this is reason, this is life and the world within and/or beyond the

biopolitical and globalized order. And it *is* promising, threatening, benevolent, hopeless, empowering, damaging—in turns. The task is to make this world that *is*.

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