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**Making Whiteness Visible: transgender, race and the paradoxes of in/visibility in *Orlando* (1928), *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and *Sacred Country* (1992)**

This essay aims to identify and examine a recurring but overlooked motif in twentieth-century literary representations of transgender: namely, the ways in which gender identity is achieved, confirmed or normalised through the construction of ‘others’ whose experiences – mediated through discourses of colonialism, Empire and race – render material for contrast, comparison or analogy. By tracking this motif across a selection of landmark texts, including Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (1928), Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and Rose Tremain’s *Sacred Country* (1992), this essay interrogates the ways in which transgender visibility can be implicated in discourses of race: in doing so it endeavours to explore the ways in which in/visibility can both confer and deny identity, and protect and subvert privilege. By demonstrating how the presence of (white) transgender characters in literary fiction across the twentieth century has served to racialize others it seeks to draw attention to the politics of in/visibility in relation to race and gender and its implications for transgender visibility in cultural representation.

Keywords: transgender; race; whiteness; colonialism; Empire; Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (1928); Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve* (1977); Rose Tremain, *Sacred Country* (1992)

With questions of visibility at the forefront of contemporary debates about transgender rights and representation, the role of visual culture (from film and television drama to social media) in advancing or impeding the struggle for recognition has received considerable critical attention in recent years. By contrast, this essay aims to extend debates to do with the politics of visibility to a different mode of cultural representation: literary fiction. Moreover, acknowledging that “economies of visibility” (Wiegman 1995, 3) have played a crucial role in the historical formation of identity categories other than gender, it proposes to identify and examine a recurring motif in literary representations of transgender: namely, the ways in which gender identity is achieved, confirmed or normalised through the construction of others whose experiences – mediated through discourses of colonialism, Empire and race – render material for contrast, comparison or analogy. I will argue that the role of non-white people in such narratives serves to implicitly construct the gender of their transgender

protagonists as white, and does so in ways which ensure the continuing ‘invisibility’ of whiteness as a universalising category. In a 2009 essay “remapping the global spectacle” of transsexuality “as a white (post)colonial phenomenon” (81), Susan Stryker – a founding figure in the field of transgender studies – argues for the importance of “acknowledging and analyzing, rather than [...] denying or downplaying, the sometimes oppressive ways in which ‘transgender whiteness’ functions in (post)colonial contexts” (89). By tracking this motif across a selection of twentieth-century texts this essay aims to examine the extent to which transgender visibility can be implicated in discourses of race: in doing so it endeavours to explore the ways in which in/visibility can both confer and deny identity, and protect and subvert privilege.

In the course of reflection on the sometimes vexed relationship between the rights claims of transgender people and certain traditions of Second Wave feminist scholarship and activism, Gayle Salamon writes that “genders beyond the binary of male and female are neither fictive nor futural, but are presently embodied and live” (2010, 96). The prominence of motifs of gender transition in fantasy fiction genres within canons of women’s writing may well have played its part in inadvertently perpetuating the misconception which Salamon identifies.<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf’s 1928 historical fantasy *Orlando* and Angela Carter’s 1977 feminist dystopia *The Passion of New Eve* arguably exemplify – even inaugurate – narrative trends whereby literary conceits to do with ‘gender crossing’ and ‘sex change’ are consigned to an imaginary past or projected into a dystopian future. The transformations which the eponymous protagonists of these narratives undergo are far removed from an expression of self-determined identity; on the contrary, they occur without volition (Woolf’s *Orlando*) or are imposed without consent (Carter’s *Eve*). They are nevertheless considered here because of the role that these and other fictional representations have played in shaping cultural perceptions of gender transition prior to the emergence of transgender rights discourses into the mainstream public sphere in the twenty first century. By contrast, Rose Tremain’s *Sacred Country* (1992) features a protagonist whose gender identity is consistently expressed as other than that assigned at birth and whose gender transition is actively desired. Moreover, the narrative is situated within literary conventions of realism and grounded in specific

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of the relationship between women’s writing, Second Wave feminism and transgender motifs in literary fiction, see Carroll (2019).

historical contexts, mapping its protagonist's life against the decline the British Empire.<sup>2</sup> *Sacred Country* has yet to attract the extensive scholarship dedicated to *Orlando* and *Passion of New Eve* and for this reason is given extended attention in this essay. Tremain's novel opens in 1952, a year which witnessed what is often considered a founding moment in the history of transgender visibility in the modern mass media: namely, the New York *Daily News's* sensationalist coverage of Christine Jorgensen's return to American soil in 1952 following her gender reassignment treatment in Copenhagen. Jorgensen's highly mediated 'visibility' can be understood as conditional on her normativity, not only in relation to gender and sexuality but also in relation to race (see Skidmore, 2011). However, for all that her 'fair' complexion and blonde hair attracted approval in relation to her femininity, her 'whiteness' as a racially constructed index of identity remained *invisible*, and therein lies the power of normative privilege. As Stryker has incisively argued:

It is not Jorgensen's pale skin or Scandinavian-American cultural heritage that made her white, but rather the processes through which *her presence racializes others while rendering opaque her own racialisation*, and the means by which unspoken prerogatives and presumed entitlements over the lives of others circulate invisibly beneath a mask of presumed universality [emphasis added]. (81-82)

Jorgensen was not the only woman living in a gender other than that assigned at birth to feature in the popular American press in the post-war decades. Emily Skidmore and C. Riley Snorton have identified a number of trans women of colour whose visibility in newspapers and periodicals did not equal that afforded to Jorgensen, including: Lucy Hicks Anderson (*Time*, *The Afro-American*, 1945); Georgia Black (*Ebony*, 1951); Carlett Brown (*Jet*, 1953); Marta Olmos Ramiro (*San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *New York Sunday Mirror*, 1954); Ava Betty Brown (*Chicago Daily Defender*, 1957); Laverne Peterson (*Honolulu Sunday Star-Bulletin and Advertiser*, 1964); Delisa Newton (*Sepia*, 1966). Indeed, as Snorton notes, Carlett Brown and Ava Betty Brown were "construct[ed] as Jorgensen's imitators" revealing what Snorton terms the "impossibility of a 'black Jorgensen'" (2017, 157). In this context, the analysis which follows seeks to demonstrate how the presence of (white) transgender characters in literary fiction across the twentieth century has served to "racialize others" (Stryker 2009, 82); by 'making whiteness visible', this essay aims to draw

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<sup>2</sup> Tremain's novel is one of a number of literary fictions of the 1990s to begin to give representation to transgender identity within literary conventions of realism, including biographical fictions such as Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1998), inspired by the life of American jazz musician and bandleader Billy Tipton (1914-1989), Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry* (1999), a fictionalised version of the life of the eponymous colonial military surgeon (c. 1799-1865), and David Ebershoff's *The Danish Girl* (2000), an imaginative retelling of the life of Lili Elbe (1882-1931). See Carroll (2019).

attention to the politics of in/visibility in relation to race and gender and its implications for transgender visibility in cultural representation.

**The “English disease”: constructing racial ‘Others’ in Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (1928) and Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* (1977)**

Virginia Woolf’s 1928 historical fantasy of sex change, *Orlando*, famously opens with its youthful protagonist in the act of “slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters” (3), the privileges conferred by nation, race and class incontrovertibly in evidence. People of African origin are dispersed across Europe and beyond in Woolf’s narrative and appear under denominations which explicitly foreground their construction as racial ‘others’. They include the “Blackamoor[s]” (22, 41) and “negroes in breeches” (81) serving in domestic households and imperial courts, Shakespeare’s Othello, with whose “frenzy” (32) of jealousy Orlando identifies in his infatuation with the Russian Princess, and the “black woman” by whom Shelmerdine is “trapped” (168). The latter becomes coded shorthand for a distinctly queer union when Orlando confirms her understanding of Shelmerdine’s allusion with the words: “Yes, negresses are seductive aren’t they?” (168). Significantly, Orlando’s change of sex manifests itself overnight – without recourse to medical means or narrative explication – while serving as English Ambassador in Constantinople. Moreover, it is preceded by an assumption of ‘Oriental’ customs and dress and followed by a sojourn with a community of ‘gypsies’.

*Orlando* is widely understood as a classic of lesbian feminist fiction and critics have suggested that both the location of Constantinople and the figure of the gypsy play a central role in its coded celebration of female same-sex desire: Karen Kaivola (1999, 249) suggests that Constantinople acts as “a privileged sign in Woolf’s imagination for a complex web of associations among gender, race, and an emerging lesbian sexuality” and Kirstie Blair (2004, 162) argues that in the period of *Orlando*’s publication “various perceptions of gypsy life, dress, behaviour, and sexuality came together to construct the gypsy as a figure rich in potential for women writers who sought to convey the complexities of lesbian desire.” However, these readings do not preclude examination of the racial dynamics at work in these appropriations: in both cases strategies of identification and ‘othering’ exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Orlando’s adoption of Turkish cloaks and trousers, smoking of

cheroots, imbibing at hookahs, partiality to coffee and frequenting of bazaars and Mosques give rise to “rumours, legends, anecdotes” (78) which fuel his reputation as a figure of glamorous allure and mystery. Moreover, under the guise of non-Western habit he is licensed to give expression to identity in ambiguous and transgressive ways. Following her sudden and unanticipated change of sex (which in some unexplained way precipitates a civil insurrection in the capital), Orlando reflects: “It is a strange fact, but a true one, that up to this moment she had scarcely given her sex a thought. Perhaps the Turkish trousers which she had hitherto worn had done something to distract her thoughts” (97). However, at the same time, the subjects of the Ottoman Empire are held at a distance by discourses which perpetuate presumptions of Western superiority; “natives” (80, 82) and “Infidels” (84), they collectively constitute a “strident multi-coloured and barbaric population” (75) in striking contrast to Orlando’s charismatic individuality. Orlando is rumoured to have wed a dancer of gypsy heritage, Rosa Pepita, the night before his transformation and, after waking from a deep sleep of seven days duration, Orlando flees the city to join a community of gypsies, guided by one of their elders, Rustum el Sadi. This temporary interlude among a people unbound by borders of empire or nation acts as a liminal period between Orlando’s life as a man and as a woman in this narrative. Orlando’s affinity with the nomadic life is explained by reference to her reputed gypsy heritage, which she shares with the dedicatee of *Orlando*, Vita Sackville-West, the author of *Pepita* (1937) a book exploring her gypsy heritage and named after her grandmother. Orlando attributes her “darkness in complexion” (75) to an encounter between a “Circassian peasant woman” (75) and an English Crusader, whereas her gypsy companions believe that she was “snatched by an English Duke from a nut tree when she was a baby” (89); whether the product of rape or abduction, her lineage is aligned with the gypsies in ways which posit her ancestors as both perpetrator and victim of colonial crimes. Acknowledging her hosts as belonging to an “ancient and civilised race”, Orlando at the same time denounces them as “ignorant and savage” (93) and “rude and barbarous” (94); her departure from the camp is ultimately made inevitable by the discovery of an “English disease” which is “inborn in her” (a “love of Nature” (90)). Jaime Hovey has argued that *Orlando* “‘playful[ly]’ exchange[s] . . . racial others for sexual tolerance” (1997, 398). Indeed, while British imperialism and its attendant ideologies may well be one of the targets of Woolf’s satire, the construction of racial others also acts to “stabilise” gender identity (Hovey 1997, 398; Kaivola 1999, 253): to put it another way, gender transgression – and the sexual desires it encodes – is legitimised at the expense of racial others, who serve to license, carry or bear associations from which Woolf’s white English protagonist is then liberated.

The protagonist of Angela Carter's 1977 dystopian fantasy, *The Passion of New Eve*, is also a white male English expatriate. Fleeing an apocalyptic New York, Evelyn is abducted by a matriarchal cult and subjected to forced gender reassignment treatment as punishment for his mistreatment of women as a heterosexual man. For all the scholarly debate which Carter's characteristically provocative narrative has attracted, little critical attention has been given to the fact that Mother, the formidable leader of the community of Beulah and former cosmetic surgeon who effects Evelyn's change of sex, is explicitly marked as a woman of colour. Despite her "blackness" (58, 59, 59, 66, 67, 70, 77) being repeatedly invoked, Mother's racial identity nevertheless seems 'invisible' to the critical eye. The concept of intersectionality has been subject to ever-expanding applications since its inception by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her landmark 1989 essay, a process accelerated in recent years by its popular dissemination via global social media. However, in the context of Carter's novel it is vital to recall the very specifically American historical, political and legal conditions which informed Crenshaw's critique of the "problematic [...] tendency" to "treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (139). Highlighting the ways in which women's rights claims were advanced with reference to Civil Rights precedents in American courts, Crenshaw interrogated the process by which analogies between gender and race obscure the specific experience of black women, whose histories have been uniquely impacted by the intersection of race and gender. Robyn Wiegman takes up this analysis in her 1995 book *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*, in which she refers to the "faulty and politically disabling analogy between 'blacks and women'" (2) and the "categorical elision" (7) which it effects. In this context she advocates two strategies: firstly, "challenging the visual scripting of identities" and, secondly, "imposing a visibility on the explicit hierarchies of entitlement cloaked by the universal" (6). The New York in which the eponymous protagonist alights at the start of Carter's narrative is on the point of civil collapse, with insurrectionary groups roaming an urban landscape bereft of the rule of law. The question of the moment, as Evelyn articulates it, is: "Were the blacks responsible, or the Women?" (11). The "combat-suited" (13) 'blacks,' armed with machine-guns and tanks, evoke the visual iconography of the Black Power movement as mediated by the white American press of the era, emphasising its perceived militancy and machismo. Indeed, the 'blacks' are explicitly gendered in the following version of the politics of black nationalist self-determination: "they had taken fresh stock of an embattled position in the ghettos and decided to make of it a tactical advantage. They abandoned dandyism and narcotics; *to a man* they put on battledress

[emphasis added]” (17). The ‘women’ similarly compete for control of public spaces but engage in more covert warfare, insulting and sexually assaulting men on the street, sabotaging weddings and “infiltrat[ing] the hookers” (17) in order to inflict retributive infection on their male clients. Evelyn’s sexual obsession with an African American woman sex worker, Leilah, who he impregnates and abandons, does not conceal his contempt for both her race and gender: “The sickness of the ghetto and the slow delirious sickness of femininity, its passivity, its narcissism, have infected me because of her. She has been doubly degraded, through her race and her sex” (36). Later revealed to be Mother’s daughter, Leilah – or rather Lilith’s – saboteur status is inconceivable to Evelyn in a context where the ‘blacks’ are exclusively men and the ‘women’ are all white. In other words, while Leilah’s status as a black woman is central to his racialised fantasies of sexual exploitation, her capacity as a radical political agent is beyond his imagining. While the revelation of Leilah/Lilith’s covert identity towards the end of the narrative arguably subverts the ‘women and blacks’ dichotomy, the centrality of a black woman to Carter’s parody of Second Wave feminist mythology nevertheless perpetuates a paradoxical invisibility.

In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter dismissed the fascination with “hypothetical great goddesses” in some strands of Second Wave feminism as “consolatory nonsense” (1979, 5) and her mercilessly satirical depiction of the mythology of Beulah can be seen as symptomatic of this position. With its focus on the symbolic significance of ancient figures of female fertility, wisdom and power, rather than the material and economic realities of past and present inequalities, this tendency seems to have largely been the preserve of white women. In this context, it is all the more striking that the leader of Beulah in Carter’s novel is explicitly and repeatedly racialised as a woman of colour and, more specifically, of African heritage: a “black goddess” (64) of tremendous size and strength, she embodies a “massive negritude” (67). However, Mother’s ‘blackness’ is largely figured within the mystical alchemical symbolism of Evelyn’s Czech refugee neighbour, Baroslav, by which Leilah’s “softly black” skin signifies “nigredo, the stage of darkness, when the material in the vessel has broken down to dead matter” (14). Mother’s ‘darkness’ is seen in similarly Manichean terms, her body posited by Evelyn as the “negative, since black, twin of my new flesh” (77). This symbolism effectively empties Mother’s identity as an African American woman of its historical and political meaning; there is nothing in the ideology or symbolism of the movement which she leads to suggest the influence of black women’s struggle for freedom and equality in the USA. Indeed, when placed in the context of the legacy of American

slavery and its exploitation of African American women's bodies, reproductive capacity and sexuality, it is difficult to contain the depiction of Mother as "breasted like a sow" (59) and "bay[ing] like a bloodhound bitch in heat" (64) within the ahistorical mode of mythology. The narrative reflects – and parodies – key Second Wave concerns with rape, reproductive rights and motherhood as issues of 'universal' concern for women, but the role of rape as a weapon of racial terror, the racial history of abortion and forced sterilisation and the violent appropriation of black women's maternity in American history is not acknowledged in this play with archetypes. Moreover, while Mother and Leilah before her are presented as 'black' within the visual economy of the narrative, their identity and experience as African American women within a very specific historical context has been rendered 'invisible' in much scholarship on the novel. Hence, to observe that Eve's femininity – whose parodic function resides in its relationship to cultural norms – is constructed as white is more than simply noting that she is not racially 'marked'; her whiteness, its assumed universality and privileged 'invisibility' is dependent on the production of racial others.

Woolf's *Orlando* and Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* approach the idea of 'changing sex' as a fantastical conceit in order to explore the cultural construction of gender, and especially femininity, in ways which are both playful and provocative. By contrast, the gender identity of the protagonist of Rose Tremain's *Sacred Country* (1992) is consistently self-determined, with the six year old narrator confiding to a pet guineafowl at the start of the narrative: "I have some news for you Marguerite, I have a secret to tell you, dear, and this is it: I am not Mary. That is a mistake. I am not a girl. I'm a boy" (6). While Tremain's protagonist adopts the name Martin from the age of eleven, it is not until 18 years later that the chapter titles, which indicate the rotating narrative perspectives in the novel, shift from 'Mary' to 'Martin'. Moreover, they do so on the occasion of his hysterectomy, reflecting the tension between Martin's self-determined gender identity (expressed in his first person narrative) and prevailing assumptions about the causal relationship between sex and gender (by which surgical reassignment is attributed a defining role in gender transition). Opening in 1952, the post war context is as central to Martin's story as it was to Jorgensen's mass media debut. A specifically British narrative of imperial decline is pivotal to the production of racial others in this narrative, but the politics of pre- and post-Civil Rights America also play an important and ambivalent role.

## **“The last imaginary places on earth”: The end of Empire in Rose Tremain’s *Sacred Country* (1992)**

In *Sacred Country* the impact of the exploitative treatment of transgender people in the post war mass media is made manifest in the response of the village vicar, the Reverend Geddis, to the sixteen year old Martin’s first attempt to articulate his identity to another: “Through his handkerchief he said that questions like this come from the sewers of the mind. He said: ‘All I can think is that you have had access to the *News of the World*’” (133). Indeed, the print press plays a pivotal role in Martin’s narrative following his flight from rural Suffolk to London. It is here that a mass market publication and a radical political periodical provide Martin with new ways of describing and understanding his identity, as well as directing him to the psychiatric and medical gatekeepers who will make gender reassignment treatment possible. With some irony, Martin’s first encounter with the term ‘transsexual’ is through the ‘Problem Pages’ of a popular women’s periodical, *Woman’s Domain*, when he writes to its Agony Aunt, D’Esté Defoe, under the pen name ‘Divided, Devon.’ Defoe is the pseudonym of Georgia Dickens, Martin’s lover at the time; Martin is able to witness Georgia’s reaction to the “extraordinary letter” (199) directly over the breakfast table but must wait a further two weeks for Defoe’s professional reply. In contrast to the sensationalist tenor of the tabloid news press, Defoe’s reply is compassionate and progressive, assuring ‘Divided, Devon’ that he is “not alone” (200) with reference to Christine Jorgensen and Michael Dillon. Dillon (1915-1962), a British doctor, naval surgeon and author of the 1946 book *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology*, is thought to be the first person to undergo phalloplasty under the medical care of pioneering plastic surgeon Sir Harold Gillies, who developed his practice treating World War Two veterans as well as people born with intersex variations. Defoe’s shadowy “teams of experts” (210) refer Martin to a psychiatrist and while Beales’s highly normative investment in conventional categories of gender (he quizzes Martin about the relative appeal of hoovering and train spotting) proves unsatisfactory his route to more enlightened support is made possible by his involvement with a very different periodical publication: *Liberty* is a “consciousness-raising” (180) poetry magazine published by two émigrés, the South African Rob and Australian Tony, from a two-room office situated above a hairdressers shop in Earl’s Court. It is Tony who offers to find Martin another psychiatrist after Beales accuses him of “lying, inventing, telling stories” (234) and his new physician, Sterns, invites him to “start again at the beginning” (244). The metropolitan print press brings the provincial Martin into contact with new social and cultural milieu, including the

bohemian and the counter-cultural, and new discourses and practices by which he can name and understand his own experience. As Martin comments, on first hearing the term 'transsexual': "I had never heard this word before. I thought, if there's a word for this, then it exists outside me, it exists in other people. I'm not alone" (200). However, gender does not prove central to Martin's understanding of the politics of identity in this novel; on the contrary, he acquires a new sense of self through the radical politics of his Commonwealth émigré friends, white men whose championing of the cause of victims of colonial politics gives rise to ambivalent analogies of gendered and racial oppression.

Martin's revelation about his gender identity in *Sacred Country* occurs during a two-minute silence to mark the death of George VI, the last Emperor of India and first Head of the Commonwealth. Indeed, the narrative of *Sacred Country* is mapped against a period which is witness to the end of Empire and the decline of Britain's position as a world power; as Martin's father, a traumatised Second World War veteran and struggling farmer, observes with bitter regret: "Things have a life-span. Everything does. Even the fucking Empire had a life-span" (284). The 1956 Suez Crisis, widely seen as marking the end of the UK's influence and status as a world power, is a pivotal event for many of the residents of the fictional village of Swaithey, whose quintessentially English landscape is under threat from the advancing forces of modernisation. A reluctant butcher, Walter Loomis, is haunted by his dead grandfather – "You are the last Loomis and you mustn't desert the meat" (40) – whose ghost only returns to "a pre-Suez state of quietude" (159) when Walter falls in love with a glamorous local dentist, Gilbert Blakey, whose attraction is attributed to his resemblance to a young Anthony Eden. This resemblance is a source of great "pride" to his mother, Margaret, "who had wept after Suez – for England and for Eden" and a "greatness that was past" (67). Margaret turns her back on the retreating coastal cliffs which threaten the foundations of the family home by the simple expedient of relocating her bedroom to the rear of the house, but the "abyss" which they are "bringing [...] nearer" (67) is symptomatic of a more fundamental historical and political 'retreat', both from the global world stage and into nostalgia for an imperial past. White people's negotiations with the new historical realities of the postcolonial present are prominent in different ways when Martin moves to the English capital and finds work as an editorial assistant and illustrator at *Liberty*. Rob, one of its founders, is a South African with a face "whiter than the sky" (178) who speaks of his "love for his country, to which he might never return" (181). The cause of his exile, whether imposed or self-inflicted, is not revealed but the implication that he is an indirect victim of the apartheid regime is

inferred in his politics. Rob's co-editor, Tony, is an Australian with "yellow hair in a pony tail" (181) and is similarly allied to the cause of a racially oppressed group, to whom he devotes his poetry. As Martin records:

The 'Abos' of Australia and the blacks of South Africa are the two groups *Liberty* is trying to help. Rob and Tony say the middle classes in England have to be woken up to the plight of these people. And I need to be woken up too. I knew about South Africa, but I didn't know – for all the years I lived in Swaithey – that the Abos were in a plight (181-182).

The disparity between the idealism of their politics and the modest means and reach of their publication is gently mocked in Martin's ingenuous rendering, but his account touches on the processes of racial identification and disavowal at work in this apparently enlightened enterprise. Rob and Tony's earnest commitment to the end of racial and colonial oppression in their home countries can readily be interpreted as a signifier of their progressive politics in the broader context of counter-cultural and anti-colonial movements in the late 1960s. However, their identification with racialised others, and the appropriation of their cause as both poetic and editorial subject matter, arguably serves to cloak their own complicity as white people in the historical oppression of black South Africans and indigenous Australians; assuming the mantle of liberators through their politically engaged publishing venture, they are able to evade accountability or blame by borrowing the perceived moral superiority granted by victim status. Consciousness-raising – a radical strategy adopted by identity politics movements of the era, from Second Wave feminism to the Black Power movement, to resist and overcome the harm caused by the internalisation of dominant ideologies of gender and race – is here a manoeuvre by which one group of white people (Rob and Tony) are able to morally upbraid another (the English middle class). It is striking that *Liberty* acts as Martin's only introduction to identity politics movements in this novel; he takes up his post at the periodical in London in 1966 and remains there until his departure for the US in 1975, but as the years pass he remains unaware of both the women's and the gay and lesbian liberation movements despite his acute consciousness of women's inequality, his lived experience of lesbian subcultures through Georgia Dickens and his presence in the capital during a period of increasingly visible activism and legislative change. It may be less surprising that Martin fails to find any sense of collective identity or community as a transgender person in this era, but the way that he is co-opted into other categories of identity merits closer attention. Rob and Tony address their friend by his chosen name from the outset but are momentarily "stunned" when he discloses what his "determination to become Martin"

(242) will entail. Their response is accepting but in ways which once again reinforce the ‘borrowing’ of racial categories of identity:

But they grew acclimatised to it. When they did, they found me more interesting than before, as though I’d become an honorary Abo. They raised my salary. They bought me my own coffee mug with the name Martin on it. They saw me as one of the dispossessed (242-243).

The historical reality of racial and colonial oppression provides a framework through which to recognise that there may be something systematic and ideological at the root of Martin’s struggle for self and social acceptance. However, while this analogy could prove the pathway through which to gain an awareness of the politics of gender identity, it does so at the expense of recognising what is unique and specific to the experience of people such as indigenous Australians. Moreover, the appropriation of racialised others to stand for gendered minorities conceals the fact that Martin, Rob and Tony’s identity is itself a racial construction: their very sense of entitlement to certain rights (self-determination, a public voice, political influence, freedom of movement,) is premised on their whiteness in a country with a long history of colonial and racial oppression. Rob and Tony continue to act as Martin’s internalised political conscience and when his former Swaithey neighbour, Walter Loomis, speaks idealistically of his desire to move to Nashville, Tennessee where, in his imagination, “there [is] a shine on everything” (269), Martin reflects: “If I’d been Rob or Tony, I would have reminded him about all the years of black slavery and segregation in the South, about freedom marchers who were killed in the middle of the road. But this was pointless” (269). The reminder remains unspoken and in due course Walter not only moves to Nashville but finds great success as a country singer; moreover, in an unexpected turn in the narrative, he is followed there by Martin who, by the close of the narrative, is living contentedly as an agricultural labourer in Tennessee. The idea of the United States, and more specially the American South, plays a significant and recurring role in the narrative of *Sacred Country*, and its history of racial oppression and inequality is given an even more equivocal treatment than Britain’s imperial past and postcolonial present.

It would not be unusual to find the US looming large in the imagination of post-war Britons as a place of modernity, progress and opportunity. Indeed, in a poignant exchange prior to his departure for America, Walter observes to Martin:

“I wish I’d known years ago that the Pursuit of Happiness was a right. In Swaithey it wasn’t, was it?  
‘No.’ I said. ‘It was a wrong’” (292).

However, in *Sacred Country* it is the rural American South, specifically the state of Tennessee, which serves as a magnet for those seeking new beginnings. Pete Loomis (Walter's uncle) is a failed migrant, having returned in undefined disgrace from a period working as a gardener for a Baptist Church in Memphis in the late 1930s to live a very stationary life in a converted trolley bus in Swaithey. However, his recollections of the South, including his special love for the music of the early twentieth century performer Jimmie Rodgers, have a formative influence on his nephew, Walter, with whom he shares his nostalgic memories over a decade later: "He said happiness was the main condition in Tennessee, despite the Depression and the bad times. Blacks were faithful there. Dogs were faithful" (20). Tennessee is figured quite explicitly as a place where a white man, regardless of his relative class or status, can enjoy a sense of power at the expense of racialised others, specifically African Americans. Internalising his uncle's aspiration, Walter works himself into a dangerous fever trying to emulate the yodelling style of Pete's favourite singer, and he takes his failure as signalling the end of his dream of social mobility and migration: "And without a yodel, there would only be an imaginary America, not a real Tennessee with its faithful darkies and its faithful dogs" (41). Following Martin's hysterectomy, Rob advises him to seek out a "far-away place" recalling Walter's departure for Tennessee and recommending it as "one of the last imaginary places on earth" (338). Sterns concurs with Rob's diagnosis, insisting that "Leaving England is what matters" (338). Any distance in perspective between Martin and Walter is now closed as he follows directly in Walter's footsteps, first of all lodging with Audrey and Bill C. Pike, with whom Walter had stayed on his arrival in the United States, and then taking up residence in the grounds of Judge Riveaux's home. Walter's friend and agent, Bentwater Bliss, had been saved from prison following prosecution on a vagrancy charge when the Judge and his wife give him work in return for bed and board; the history of the Judge's extensive property, and the role of his ancestors in the era of plantation slavery, is revealed in Bentwater's recollections: "I slept in what once was the slaves' cabin. I think my mattress still had the body fluids of slaves steeped into it 'cause it smelled like it was a person. But it was better than sand" (327). Again, a marginalised white man charts his social and economic progress in racialised terms, retrospectively equating his vulnerability with the bondage of the enslaved. When Martin enters the employment of the now widowed Judge he works alongside Jeremiah, an African American farm labourer, and becomes a frequent visitor to the family home he shares with his wife, Beulah, and their twin daughters, Lettie and Glorie. In keeping with the 'weeping prophet' of the Old Testament, Jeremiah's outlook on life seems a melancholy one: "What I

don't have, an' what I never done had, is the gift of contentment'" (350). This attitude might be attributed to an idiosyncratic temperament but could also be read as a much deeper and more historical longing, rooted in the African American experience and by no means redundant in 1976, the year which the narrative has reached: "I keep on thinkin' there's somethin' more. I keep on and on believing there's something *more* gonna come an' then I'll be happy. After that new thing done come. After that *more* thing done show itself to me. Then I'll be a happy man'" (emphasis in original, 351). Beulah's name likewise has Biblical origins, conjuring a vision of a promised land (an association mobilised to satirical effect in *The Passion of New Eve*) but also evoking practices of naming with their origins in the era of slavery, and she counsels Jeremiah in the following terms: "'Look at you' life, Jeremiah Hill, and then look back at the life of you' ancestors who were slaves down in Georgia.' She says: 'You look at that an' see if you don't got reason to be happy'" (351). The more recent achievements of the Civil Rights movement might offer more topical reasons for optimism but the assassinations of its leaders, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, in 1965 and 1968 respectively and the persistence of racial inequality, discrimination, prejudice and terror, could equally offer good cause for Jeremiah's pessimism. However, Beulah's counsel of gratitude, as depicted in this narrative, does not puncture Pete and Walter Loomis's dream of the 'faithful' African American in ways that it might. Martin adds his own voice to those trying to part Jeremiah from his radical dissatisfaction: "And out in the fields I say to Jeremiah: 'Age isn't the only thing to creep up on us. Sometimes it's happiness'" (353). Jeremiah's discontent as a labouring African American man in the South in the 1970s provides the benchmark against which Martin can claim his happiness, as a white man.

In "The Persistence of Transgender Travel Narratives," Aren Z. Aizura suggests that Christine Jorgenson's highly publicised story has worked as a "template" for fantasies of departure as a prelude to "triumphant" return, the "feat of self-transformation" (2012, 153) having been achieved elsewhere. Martin's refusal to return from America to England to 'complete' his gender reassignment treatment can be seen as a significant departure from this convention. Indeed, Emma Parker interprets this refusal as symptomatic of an implicitly queer critique of essentialised constructions of sex and gender, noting that "a penis is superfluous to Martin's identity as a man" (2007, 307). However, the location in which Martin chooses to remain is a highly charged one. As has been noted, it is not until Martin arrives in the United States that the chapter headings which denote his point of view switch from 'Mary' to 'Martin'. At this pivotal point in the narrative, Martin observes from his

lodgings with a white American couple: “I’m an ordinary man, not an imaginary one. Their black maid, Lois, cleans my room” (338). The casual aside which follows this affecting reflection underlines the fact that his capacity to be an ‘ordinary man’ is made possible by his place within a racial hierarchy; it is in an “‘imaginary place’” – the American South – that he ceases to be an “‘imaginary’” (338) man. Moreover, the ‘ordinary’ man which he has become is, implicitly, a white man; the nominal privileges ‘lost’ to white men in post imperial England are restored in the post-Civil Rights US, and anxieties to do with the social legitimacy of non-normative gender identity are offset by unspoken racial privilege.

The novels considered in this essay all exist in a complex relationship to discourses of sex and gender contemporary to the era in which they were written, including theories of ‘sexual inversion’ and homosexuality in the 1920s, controversies to do with some feminists’ response to the role of male-to-female transsexuals in the women’s movement in the 1970s, and founding interventions in the emerging transgender rights movement in the late twentieth century. Each one, in very different ways, has served to shape the field of visibility for transgender representation in literary fiction and beyond. Less recognised is the extent to which these narratives of gender transition rely on the construction of others who – for all their diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, nationality and class – are subject to processes of racialisation as a consequence of histories of European colonialism and American slavery. Through close comparative analysis of a selection of illustrative texts, this essay has argued for the importance of interrogating a particular problematic of visibility: namely, identity formations and narrative dynamics in which the visibility by which transgender recognition is achieved becomes complicit in the invisibility by which racial privilege is preserved.

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