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ABSTRACT: This article argues that women poets writing in the Harlem Renaissance marshaled the communal connotations of ballad form and genre to enter covertly into and influence the masculine domain of Black cultural nationalism. The elasticity of the ballad enabled Georgia Douglas Johnson, Helene Johnson, and Gwendolyn Bennett to articulate a subject position wherein Black women could contribute to the effort to cultivate a New Negro consciousness *as* Black women poets. This reading shows that the respectability politics of their conventional poems overlay demands for racial and gender justice and sovereignty.

KEYWORDS: New Negro, cultural nationalism, ballad, gender, race

In the twentieth century, Harlem Renaissance scholars charged the poetry of Georgia Douglas Johnson (1877–1966) and Gwendolyn Bennett (1902–81) with sentimentalism and political quietism. Helene Johnson (1907–95), a contemporary of Douglas Johnson and Bennett, generally suffered less critique, but her more conventional lyric poetry has remained largely unread.[1] What Maureen Honey has identified as the field of "[r]evisionist Harlem Renaissance scholarship" has since shifted our understanding of women's writing during the Harlem Renaissance. This scholarship has drawn attention to these poets' political investments and to what Mark Sanders has called the "heterodox modernism" in which Harlem Renaissance writers engaged.[2] Building on the work of scholars like Akasha Gloria Hull, Cheryl Wall, Claudia Tate, Sandra Y. Govan, and Jennifer Wilks, who have recuperated Harlem Renaissance writers like Douglas Johnson and Bennett from obscurity, revisionist Harlem

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Renaissance scholarship brings together lyric poets, the New Negro movement, and the free verse movement associated with canonical modernism. Honey in particular has shown that the "New Negro sensibilities" of poets like Bennett "were intertwined with their lyricism," so that lyric verse in both experimental and traditional forms conveyed the Black woman poet's personal expression as it advanced her contributions to modernist aesthetics and to discussions of gender and race politics (Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, 17, 3, 227n5).

While lyric reading has proliferated in recent studies such as Honey's, or in Sonya Posmentier's *Cultivation and Catastrophe: The Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature* (2017), this revisionist scholarship has not yet expanded to accommodate what Michael Cohen has referred to as "ballad reading." Emerging from Virginia Jackson's theory of "lyric reading," Cohen's ballad reading describes a set of reading practices that dominated institutionalized models of interpreting US poetry during the nineteenth century. These reading practices were predicated on the assumption that "poems indexed particular times, places, and cultures; that they both narrated and constituted popular, social history; and that they created in readers a sense of identification with the collective spirit embodied in the poem."[3] This article brings assumptions of ballad reading to Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett's poems to reveal the self-conscious ways they marshalled histories of the ballad form and genre to contribute to the New Negro movement. By mobilizing the ballad's collectivist energies, these women could enter into and shape the masculine domain of the New Negro movement's cultural nationalist project (articulated explicitly by Alain Locke in his 1925 anthology, *The New Negro*).[4]

The ballad's multiple affiliations arguably provided a more palatable version (to white and Black readerships) of the folk "authenticity" that many Harlem Renaissance poets sought in their turn to dialect, the African continent, or the US city streets for aesthetic forms and content.[5] The genre is linked simultaneously to a European literary tradition, a gendered-feminine mass culture, a folk identity, and a history of nation-building.[6] The elasticity of the ballad enables poets like Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett to articulate a subject position wherein Black women could contribute to the effort to cultivate a New Negro consciousness *as* Black women poets. They revise the racialized, gendered, and class-based identities that New Negro ideology imposed on them to accommodate an authoritative and Black feminine subjectivity that is neither maternalized nor sexualized in essential terms. Their lyrical ballads allow them to perform the bourgeois gentility that New Negro ideology demanded of Black women while intervening in contemporary racial politics as well as the politics of their fellow Harlem Renaissance poets' more overtly radical aesthetic experiments.[7]

The stakes of maintaining propriety as New Negro women were high. As Nina Miller has written, New Negro ideology prescribed women the role of "face of the race."[8] This role required New Negro women to "direct (white) public scrutiny to her own gentility in an ongoing public relations gesture" while sustaining attacks on her conventionality from young artists (*Making Love Modern*, 12). "[W]hile white women of similar educational and sociological background were trying to throw off sexual restrictions" in the

twentieth century's early decades, Anne Stavney acknowledges, Black women sought to defend themselves against the contemporary "racist allegations of sexual immorality" that white discourse promulgated after Reconstruction.[9] Not only were Black women required to contend with "shifting definitions of femininity," then, but as Maria Balshaw notes, they were additionally faced with "a credo of racial uplift which also expresse[d] itself in terms of the management of the (female) body."[10] To counter white impulses to sexualize the Black woman's body, this management often manifested by maternalizing Black women or by positioning them in sacrificial, service-giving (but not servant), and caregiving roles—as teachers, nurses, or librarians. Failing to fulfill the New Negro ideal of feminine gentility could mean legitimating white discourse about Blackness, which asserted "black female immorality, impurity, and licentiousness" as the source of all supposed racial degradation.[11] The emphasis of New Negro womanhood on moral, spiritual, and sexual purity sought to foster communal pride and solidarity among Black Americans. Nevertheless, New Negro ideology demanded that Black women fulfill an outdated and white European-American ideal that located women within an idealized domestic sphere and excluded them from the public spaces of modern Harlem (Stavney, "'Mothers of Tomorrow,'" 534–37). The Anglo-European origins of the lyrical ballad could enable Black women poets to fulfill this ideal, while the genre's communal function facilitated their participation in the public New Negro project.[12]

The genteel New Negro aesthetics that inform poems such as Douglas Johnson's "Motherhood" (1922, originally published in *The Crisis*) emerge through the ballad form she uses. Each of the poem's eight-line stanzas comprises two common measure stanzas, a form commonly associated with the ballad, using alternating four-stress and three-stress lines and an *abcb* rhyme scheme. Douglas Johnson also aligns "Motherhood" with a ballad tradition of unwanted pregnancies and infanticides.[13] Her callback to traditional folk ballads like the British Child ballads becomes most salient in the poem's final stanza:

˘ / ˘ ˘ / / ˘ /
Don't knock at my heart, little one,
˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
I cannot bear the pain
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Of turning deaf ears to your call
/ ˘ / ˘ /
Time and time again.
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
You do not know the monster men
˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Inhabiting the earth,
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Be still, be still, my precious child,
˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
I cannot give you birth.[14]

The poem's formal regularity exhibits the racial uplift credo associated with the New Negro movement, whereby Black women's imitation of white feminine gentility operated, in Balshaw's words, "as a mark of civility" that repudiated white notions of Black women's licentiousness (Balshaw, "New Negroes, New Women," 131). Although the poem's text only alludes to race, the title under which it was later published in *Bronze: A Book of Verse* (1922) was "Black Woman"; in Douglas Johnson's own words, this volume of poetry "was entirely racial" in contrast to her first volume, *The Heart of a Woman and Other Poems* (1918).[15] As a mass culture form associated with Anglo-European literary histories and established European-American reading practices, the ballad allows Douglas Johnson to stage what Miller has called "[b]ourgeois publicity," which "functions simultaneously as an unveiling (of the black middle class itself) and a concealment (of the race generally, as represented by the lower classes)" (Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 154). The performative "civility" of the Black middle class conceals Blackness specifically as it has been conceived by white discourse. Fittingly, the ballad is a poetic form that in British contexts had been understood—especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—as a civilizing force in a nation's or people's history. As Meredith Martin has written, under such understandings of the ballad the "civilized is always predicated on the fantasy of the uncivilized, imaginary primitive past" (Martin, "'Imperfectly Civilized,'" 350). Here, the ballad stanza's orderly and patterned language and Douglas Johnson's callbacks to an Anglo-European ballad tradition allow her to position herself in relation to the "imaginary primitive past" associated with that ballad tradition–a "primitive past" that avoids derogatory assumptions about her race and gender. By appealing to this particular folk identity, rather than to one more overtly racialized, she situates herself in the civilizing discourse of racial uplift.

Yet Douglas Johnson complicates this staged "civility" insofar as her speaker symbolically aborts her future child, refusing maternity because of her sense of responsibility toward the next generation of Black Americans. Over the Anglo-European ballad's form and tropes, she layers a Black American tradition in representing racial violence: the trope of the Black mother killing her own children to protect them from this violence.[16] More general rejections of motherhood appear throughout the Harlem Renaissance as well. Angelina Weld Grimké's anti-lynching play *Rachel* (1916), which some have considered a founding document for the Harlem Renaissance, features precisely this trope through its titular character.[17] By adhering to Anglo-European ballad conventions, Douglas Johnson appropriates the European-American inheritances of New Negro ideology's white domestic ideal for Black women. But she subverts those inheritances and refuses them through her assertion of a Black feminine identity independent from motherhood, rejecting the "civilization" imposed on her by asserting her own sense of community.

While comparing the folk forms of Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett to those of their male contemporaries like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Countee Cullen can present some limitations, such comparison usefully illuminates the gender politics of Harlem Renaissance folk aesthetics. In addition to the domestic, bourgeois, genteel ideal of womanhood, a second ideal of womanhood emerged within the New

Negro movement's revitalization project: an essentialized and eroticized icon that Miller has called "the primitive African woman." Miller aligns primitivist modernism more generally with "the (largely male) avant-garde" of Harlem, to which Black women's lyric poetry—in her reading—runs counterpoint.[18] But the Afrocentric impulses of some Harlem Renaissance writers were not *merely* essentialist and nostalgic primitivism.[19] It is certainly the case, moreover, that Bennett and Johnson at times used the trope of "the primitive African woman" within their own poetry. The "largely masculine avant-garde elite" that included poets like Hughes wrote in conventional verse forms with Anglo-European histories, such as the ballad or the sonnet (Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 210). And especially for poets like Cullen and McKay, the twentieth-century literary establishment would come to dismiss their more conventional and "British" verse as sentimental, bourgeois, feminine, or even "racially empty"—much as it dismissed the conventional verse of Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett.[20] Meanwhile, Johnson has been read as posing clichéd avant-garde attacks on bourgeois conventionality in poems like "Cui Bono?," which voices the repressed desires of a genteel woman whose sense of "self-respect" prevents her from experiencing the love of which she dreams (Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 177). What such readings neglect to acknowledge, though, is that "Cui Bono?" follows formal ballad stanza conventions, even if it does so ironically.[21] Comparing the literary output of these women with their male contemporaries clarifies both the gender politics they navigated as New Negro women poets and the gender politics of twentieth-century criticism, which delayed critical recognition of their poetry because of its putative feminine conventionality.

These women used the ballad's gendered and genteel form to participate in the New Negro cultural national project, courting mass appeal at times to veil their political goals while demanding space for themselves within that project. Reading Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett's ballads shows that the respectability politics of their poems overlay clear demands for racial and gender justice and sovereignty.

Folk Origins and Respectable Ballad Forms

Critics have long read the ballad's formal features as intimately bound up with its communal function. The rhyme, regular rhythm, and refrains that ballads incorporate are instrumental to achieving what Diane Dugaw has called "an aesthetics of accessibility and collective voice."[22] In her account of eighteenth-century ballad discourse, Martin suggests that communal consciousness has long—if not always—been linked to ballads. According to this discourse, ballads record "a nation's earliest poets as well as evidence of early songs that appeared at the beginning of every culture" (Martin, "'Imperfectly Civilized,'" 348). They could project communal nostalgia to establish a shared origin and history for a group and to provide a source of identification between individual and collective. Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett use ballad form to draw on the genre's capacity for conveying communal folk origins to express the affects that accompany the act of locating and codifying a unifying origin for Black racial identity.

Understanding the ballad as at once popular, genteel, feminine, yet nationalizing and 'folk,' assumes that poetic forms carry their unique histories into each of their iterations. In his discussion of this phenomenon, Fredric Jameson explicates the historical operation of literary form through the generative example of music history, "wherein folk dances are transformed into aristocratic forms like the minuet (as with the pastoral in literature), only then to be reappropriated for new ideological (and nationalizing) purposes in romantic music."[23] Repurposing an aesthetic form does not supplant the ideological content that form originally carried. Rather, reappropriation causes a layering of meaning. As a "narrative species of folk songs," the ballad is apt for observing this historical operation.[24] Ballads have long been appropriated across class and race lines—in broad terms, from "illiterate or only partly literate people" transmitting the genre orally in Britain, to learned ballad collectors like Bishop Thomas Percy who publish traditional British ballads in writing, and eventually to Black American poets who write original ballads (Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary*, 23).

A US ballad tradition was well established when Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett were writing; but this local tradition focused more on narrative than lyrical ballads, and the nationalist genteel ballad discourse that developed after the Civil War actively erased the legacy of slavery by disregarding such works as antislavery poems or spirituals.[25] Instead of impersonal narrative ballads, these poets compose expressive lyrical ballads in the tradition of British poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). It is instructive, then, to account for both the ballad's and the lyric's generic features when parsing these women's poems and their relationship with their literary historical moment. Like the ballad, the lyric has been read as possessing a "deep memory of forms and words" from its history, while it "defines itself in its affiliative and contentious relation to the genres and discourses it both draws on and resists."[26] Every act of repurposing a literary form causes the form to acquire new meaning that will proceed to affect the way it produces meaning thereafter.

We might understand why critics have overlooked the ballads that Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett wrote by recalling that it was early twentieth-century critics who codified the ballad form. The ballads these poets wrote often deviate from the stanzaic shape with which most twenty-first century literary critics are familiar: the quatrain with alternating four-stress and three-stress lines, and end-rhymes in the second and fourth lines.[27] Yet as Martin notes, it was only in the 1920s—after Douglas Johnson, the oldest of the three poets, had begun writing—that "the transhistoric and cross-cultural story of the ballad quatrain took firm hold in nearly all literary historical accounts" (Martin, "'Imperfectly Civilized,'" 352). Prior to that date, critics more readily recognized that ballad stanzas could range from two to seven or more lines. For early nineteenth-century poets Robert Southey and Sir Walter Scott, the ballad stanza often comprised two lines with seven stresses each (Martin, "'Imperfectly Civilized,'" 351–52). Especially when the poet uses an iambic stress pattern, this iteration of the ballad stanza resembles the 'fourteener,' a metrical line containing fourteen syllables. Since the Middle Ages, poets have commonly broken each line within a pair of fourteeners with a hemistich, and the resulting form is "a quatrain of lines stressed 4-3-4-3 and rhyming *abab*," becoming

"the familiar 'eight-and-six' form of ballad meter called common meter or common measure."[28] Even when the poet omits the hemistich, though, the seven-stress line can produce the ballad's recognizable rhythm when a caesura follows the fourth stress; as George Layng has found, evidence of such practice survives in folk ballads like Child 144: "Robin Hood and the Bishop of Hereford" (Layng, "The Rude Style," 15). While Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett do revise the ballad form, their experimentation also involved their use of its (now) less familiar iterations.

Douglas Johnson especially makes repeated use of the fourteener in her poetry.[29] In "The Octoroon" (1922), Douglas Johnson appeals to the central role multiracial figures played in iconography of New Negro womanhood.[30] She, however, marks out her midline caesurae in this poem to indicate what Barbara Foley has called "the paradoxes of the one-drop rule," the early twentieth-century US doctrine that determined race based on blood quantum.[31] Although the "octoroon" is legally classified as a multiracial person, she does not identify as such:

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
One drop of midnight in the dawn of life's pulsating stream
/ ˘ ˘ / ˘˘ / ˘ / || ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Marks her an alien from her kind, a shade amid its gleam;[32]

The caesura in the first line is weak, if at all present, but the comma in the second line forces a phrasal pause. This pause occurs, moreover, at precisely the point where the speaker indicates the social isolation that the titular woman experiences. She is isolated from the "gleam" of her white community because a single "drop of midnight" classifies her as "a shade." The second line's rhythm both reinforces the line's content and imitates the rhythm of the ballad quatrain, which forces a phrasal pause when the reader's eye shifts between four-stress and three-stress lines. Considering this poem alongside "Motherhood" shows Douglas Johnson's consistent interest in experimenting with the ballad to interrogate contemporary discourses surrounding Black women and to explore those women's attitudes toward their roles within a community.

Bennett and Johnson also play with the ballad stanza to address issues of racial identity. While Bennett's "Heritage" (1923) is widely anthologized and discussed, it is not typically understood as engaging with a ballad tradition. But the poem comprises six three-line stanzas, and the stress pattern of these stanzas resembles the ballad quatrain, absent a single line. Each stanza begins with an expression of the speaker's desire. She says, "I want to see," "hear," "breathe," "feel"; she desires to experience the sensuality of a primitive landscape with "palm-trees" and "silent sands," inhabited by primitive peoples, "lithe Negro girls" and "a strange black race" that chants "[a]round a heathen fire." Though she mentions a "Sphinx-still face" in the third stanza, the speaker turns to the African continent most explicitly in the final two stanzas:

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
I want to breathe the Lotus flow'r
/ ˘ / ˘ /
Sighing to the stars
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
With tendrils drinking at the Nile . . .

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
I want to feel the surging
˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Of my sad people's soul
/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Hidden by a minstrel-smile.[33]

In the poem's first four stanzas, the second four-stress line that one would expect in a ballad quatrain is absent. But in these final two stanzas, the four-stress 'third' line is present, leaving each of those stanzas without a second three-stress line. Ellipses trail at the ends of the final lines of the first, third, and fifth stanzas to underscore the sense of absence that the stanzaic form evokes.

These formal absences anticipate the final absence that the poem's speaker articulates through her desire for—and therefore current lack of—some sensory perception of the live, collective "soul" of her "sad people." The "minstrel-smile" evokes the "mastered *masks*" or "minstrel manipulations" that Houston A. Baker associates with a 'mastery of form,' an artistic and cultural practice that involves Black figures appropriating aesthetic and intellectual forms from white supremacist culture to subvert them for their own agendas (Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, 85, 33–36). Bennett's invocation of the ballad, however, grants the word "minstrel" a double meaning. It suggests the tradition of minstrelsy to which Baker refers: the racist entertainment form wherein performers don blackface to "perfor[m] songs and music associated with the black communities of the southern United States." But it also suggests the tradition linked to ballad history—that is, the singers or musicians "of the medieval period, *esp*[*ecially* those] who sin[g] heroic or lyric poetry," or any "person likened to a minstrel for playing music, singing ballads, etc."[34] Bennett's speaker dons a doubly minstrel identity by becoming at once minstrel-show caricature and folk balladeer. The "Lotus-flow'r" and "Nile" also suggest Bennett's investment in ancient Egypt, a popular investment in the 1920s and 1930s. Black historians claimed ancient Egyptian civilization as not only a proud and regal dimension of the Black diaspora's collective history but also the global foundation for modern civilization.[35] For Belinda Wheeler, Bennett's speaker ultimately "brings a youthful exuberance to the jungle setting and embraces her ancestral past."[36] Yet in the poem's final stanza, the speaker turns away from the African continent to seek a "soul" that exists *presently* behind her own minstrel mask—a soul more proximal than an imagined ancestral Africa, and more dignified than a minstrel-show caricature. Bennett revises the ballad stanza to stress the urgency of finding the soul behind the minstrel mask that many Black Americans—and especially those who subscribed to New Negro ideology—wore.

Much as Bennett's speaker seeks the precise location of her "sad people's soul" or identity, in "I Am Not Proud" (1929) Johnson imagines the origins and location of racial identity in literal terms. In its entirety, the poem is a single ballad stanza:

/ ˘ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
I am not proud that I am bold
˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Or proud that I am black.
/ ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘ /
Color was given me as a gage
˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
And boldness came with that.[37]

Johnson's use of the word "gage" here denotes a "pledge . . . of a person's appearance to do battle in support of his [*sic*] assertions. Hence, a challenge."[38] As an archaism that recalls medieval battle conventions, Johnson's diction situates her ballad within the historical context from which traditional Anglo-European folk ballads are thought to have emerged. By depicting her racial identity as a challenge with which she has been presented, and by taking up this challenge, the speaker positions herself on a battleground. She chooses boldness by choosing Blackness. Johnson foregrounds the urgency of the speaker's present context through the poetic compression of the ballad quatrain and, of course, through the speaker's inhabitation of a battleground space. She uses the tight formal constraints of the ballad stanza to shed light on the personal affordances that accompany the social constraints of her speaker's race.

Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett were not only interested in the ballad stanza as a poetic form; they also used the ballad to address contemporary issues concerning racial identity. The ballad's history as a nationalizing genre facilitates their commentary on these issues. Due to the way the ballad has traveled through history, it has attained the status of a fundamentally communal genre. By engaging this genre, these poets situate the speakers and figures in their poems in relation to a broader community. But those figures' affective relationships with the community's shared identity can be fraught. The ballad enables Douglas Johnson and Bennett to examine the negative impact of widespread racial discourse on a racialized individual's ability to connect with their community, while Johnson highlights the positive impact of choosing to enter that community. Whether at the level of the government institution with the one-drop rule, the Black American community with African heritage, or the personal battleground of racial identity, all three poets use the lyrical ballad to consider the affective relationship between the individual and the racial community of which they are a part.

Romantic Conventions in Douglas Johnson's "[N]onracial" Verse

It is not only the form and rhythm of Anglo-European ballads that poets like Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett found apt for their writing on identity politics: they also turn to imagery and themes popular in British Romanticism. Writing in Arna

Bontemps's *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered* (1972), Ronald Primeau remarks that "Georgia Douglas Johnson's Romanticism is the Romanticism of the best poetry of the Harlem Renaissance," explicitly comparing her late poem "Your World" (1962) to Wordsworth's *Prelude*.[39] In "Motherhood," maternal infanticide serves as a point of continuity between the British ballad tradition and the Harlem Renaissance. In her poem "Prejudice," a sublime landscape provides this continuity. As Evie Shockley has suggested, "poets like Georgia Douglas Johnson, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Angelina Weld Grimké, and Mae Cowdery would 'encode' conventional nature imagery with racial subtexts in order to circumvent the constraints of respectability."[40] And Shockley's argument certainly holds true for a poem like "Prejudice." What initially appear as merely conventional Romantic topoi carry revolutionary potential, so that Douglas Johnson can demand collective response to racial violence.[41] Reading poems like "Prejudice" balladically evinces the coexistence of a lyric mode and conventional ballad form with urgent concern about the communal impact of contemporary white violence against Black bodies in the early twentieth-century United States.

In "Prejudice," Douglas Johnson uses the long, seven-stress ballad line and conjures eerie imagery of a natural environment. She characterizes the mist in her poem as "ghoulish," and alludes to a Western mythological tradition by locating her poem's landscape at Sicily's Mount Etna. Douglas Johnson thereby recalls the sublime aesthetic of canonical Romantic literature in the Anglo-European tradition. In particular, she evokes the supernatural sublime with which Coleridge aligned himself, when he retrospectively commented in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) upon his contributions to the *Lyrical Ballads*.[42]

Yet, the simile Douglas Johnson uses to establish this macabre environment indexes contemporary racial violence. For ease of reference, I quote the poem in full:

˘ / ˘/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
These fell miasmic rings of mist, with ghoulish menace bound,
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Like noose-horizons tightening my little world around,
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
They still the soaring will to wing, to dance, to speed away,
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
And fling the soul insurgent back into its shell of clay:

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Beneath incrusted silences, a seething Etna lies,
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
The fire of whose furnaces may sleep–*but never dies!*[43]

The image of the noose in the second line would have resonated with contemporary readers as a metonym for the many Black people whom late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century lynch mobs murdered by hanging.[44] And lynching was unquestionably a topic that pressed on Douglas Johnson's creative imagination: as C. C. O'Brien has

found, she wrote eleven anti-lynching plays, though most of them "lac[k] a copyright date and remained unpublished until Claudia Tate composed *The Selected Works of Georgia Douglas Johnson* (1997)" (O'Brien, "Cosmopolitanism," 580). While these plays seem to have been written during and after the year 1925, in 1922 (the year "Prejudice" was published) lynchings of Black Americans occurred at the average rate of almost one a week.[45] Reading "Prejudice" with the conventions of ballad reading in mind reveals that Douglas Johnson was thinking about lynching in creative contexts earlier in the decade than is commonly recognized, and that she contributed to anti-lynching discourse through poetry in addition to drama.

Douglas Johnson conceives of the environment in "Prejudice" as the noose "tightening" around the speaker's "little world." In this way, she stresses that the practice of lynching is a form of oppression that can pervade every aspect of one's existence, much as a miasmatic (disease-ridden) mist can penetrate any environment where air is present. By depicting this mist as surrounding the "world," furthermore, Douglas Johnson expands the impact of lynching beyond the individual speaker and to the shared space of the collective, even if the lyric speaker experiences that shared space from the "little" vantage point of her individual subjectivity.

The boundaries of the speaker's "soul insurgent" grow indefinite not only to reinforce this emphasis on the collective impact of racial violence but also to herald an enraged collective response to that violence. Following the poem's section break, the speaker describes a "seething Etna," a synecdoche for magma, "[b]eneath incrusted silences." The volcanic crust of silence beneath which the magma lies operates as another minstrel mask, and the lava as the Black collective "fire" with which the speaker's identity has now merged. The physical and affective "seething" of this magma anticipates and answers "the surging / Of my sad people's soul" for which Bennett's speaker in "Heritage" calls only a year later (Bennett, "Heritage," 508). Douglas Johnson discovers a live, collective Black identity in close proximity to her speaker. She looks neither to an idealized past nor to a future awakening of the fires (although the implication of a future eruption is present); instead, Douglas Johnson foregrounds the present and continued survival of these fires in the face of miasmatic oppression.

Douglas Johnson's use of the ballad and her evocation of a Romantic landscape creates a version of the "organic trope" that Foley identifies in early twentieth-century US nationalist discourses, which emerged in the Bolshevik Revolution's wake. This trope, which for Foley epitomizes "the recrudescence of romantic metaphorical language," enabled "connections among soil, folk, race, and nation" (Foley, *Spectres of 1919*, 141, 198). While the organic trope initially traveled through racist, nativist, and eugenicist discourses, its "essentialization of race" and "fetishization of place" would appeal to progressive and leftist groups and also to Locke in his *New Negro* anthology (162).[46] Douglas Johnson's speaker implies her identification with the volcanic landscape and embodies the kind of collective identity based in landscape that Foley discusses. But this landscape is a literary one, shadowed by Mount Etna's mythic proportions. Such abstraction allows Douglas Johnson to avoid essentializing race, without depoliticizing the poem entirely: to be sure, the image of the noose and the speaker's call for collec-

tive action remain starkly political, while couched in the learned, genteel imagery of a natural yet mythic landscape.

Even if the ballad tradition has the potential to evoke a "primitive" or ancient past, "Prejudice" shows how histories of the ballad allow Douglas Johnson to express the urgent need for collective response to contemporary racial violence. She masters the ballad's folk yet feminizing structures of rhyme and meter, but she also uses uncommon lineation and hints subtly at a future eruption of collective Black rage, currently "seething" in response to racial violence. "Prejudice" exemplifies how the ballad offered women poets of the Harlem Renaissance a means of participating in and contributing to the cultural renaissance without merely imitating white, masculine, or elite avant-garde forms. Instead, they used coded language and coded poetic form to index contemporary events, to foster community, and to grant their own voices power within that community.

Reimagining the 'Primitive Drum' through Lyric

By drawing on the lyrical ballad specifically, Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett articulate a subject position in which Black women can both contribute to the effort to cultivate New Negro consciousness and interrogate the means by which their contemporaries seek to develop this consciousness. As Honey has noted, women writers of the Harlem Renaissance "were attracted to the lyric in a racist era that denied them personhood" (Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, 20). For Miller, moreover, Bennett and Johnson use the lyric with "the goal of feminizing avant-garde poetics, [each] claiming for herself a place within the essential renaissance" (Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 13). To that end, all three poets' use of lyrical ballads enabled them to achieve what Locke described as the "folk-expression *and* self-determination" of cultural-political centers such as Prague and Dublin, centers to which he compared Harlem (Locke, *The New Negro*, 7, emphasis added). Lyrical ballads afforded Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett the opportunity to participate in the New Negro project, while carving out a new place for themselves to act as autonomous subjects within that project and even aligning themselves with emergent avant-garde attitudes toward the nature of Black national consciousness.

The poems for which Johnson and Bennett are best known—such as "Bottled" and "Poem" for Johnson, and "Advice" for Bennett—are not formally ballads. Like the formal ballads, though, these poems thematize one's relationship to one's community and the folk identity that community offers. Here, I turn briefly from the lyrical ballad as formal and generic category to the more nebulous category of lyric *qua* lyric to demonstrate how the ballads extend the project that Johnson and Bennett articulate in "Bottled," "Poem," and "Advice." These poems seek to convey Black women's consciousness *in process* as the poets navigate the growth of the male-dominated New Negro consciousness. They comment reflexively on expressive cultural forms—dance, music, and decorative arts—by imagining interpersonal scenes of artistic reception and production. More transparently displaying an avant-garde sensibility than the

formal ballads do through their free verse forms and informal diction, these poems register ambivalence about contemporary aesthetic discourse and the forms of "folk-expression" it promoted. Johnson and Bennett acknowledge both the appeal of their male contemporaries' essentializing strategies and those same strategies' limitations for their own creative aims. The personal and poetic conflicts that these texts record further illuminate the poets' responses to the broader conversation about primitivist essentialism, folk identity, and cultural heritage to which each contributes through her lyrical ballads. "Bottled," "Poem," and "Advice" evince Johnson's and Bennett's processes of seeking out poetic strategies and forms of representation that could accommodate their full personhood within Harlem's cultural revival—and the complications embedded within that task.

Johnson's "Bottled" begins to make these complications legible by tracing the speaker's patterns of thought while identifying evidence of 'authentic' folk identity in Harlem. "Bottled" begins with the speaker's meditation on a bottle of sand that sits in the 135th Street library. 'This / Sand was taken from the Sahara desert,' states the bottle's label, and the speaker wonders why "[s]ome bozo's been all the way to Africa to get some sand."[47] She then recounts seeing a Black man on the street. His swallowtail coat denotes his assimilation into and imitation of the value system governing white gentility.[48] But the dance he spontaneously performs to street music denotes an African interiority, at least for the speaker who "could see his face, / And somehow, I could see him dancin' in a jungle, / A real honest-to-cripe jungle." The speaker details her vision of this man dancing before she exclaims:

> Say! That man that took that sand from the Sahara desert
> And put it in a little bottle on a shelf in the library,
> That's what they done to this shine, ain't it? Bottled him. (Johnson, "Bottled," 603)

The man's clothes, in other words, are the glass, while he—and the part of himself that he expresses through his dance—is the sand. To the speaker, the man has achieved what Bennett's speaker in "Heritage" desired: to find the soul behind the minstrel mask.

The narrative appears at first to promote what Baker has called a "deformation of mastery," but Johnson complicates this interpretation through the lyric speaker's voyeuristic observation of the man. Unlike "mastery of form," "deformation of mastery" is an artistic and cultural practice that looks toward an African ancestry, the sounds of which are "alien" and "*deformed*" because their indigeneity is incomprehensible to the (white colonial) intruder (Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, 51, emphasis in original). The speaker of "Bottled" describes the man's dance as "authentically" African, "[n]o / Charleston or Black Bottom for him," and he

> Just kept on dancin' and twirlin' that cane
> And yellin' out loud every once in a while.
> I know the crowd thought he was coo-coo. (Johnson, "Bottled," 603)

The crowd—as white intruders into the African "jungle" to which the street music transports the man—fails to comprehend the dance, and this failure would support the argument for the dance's deforming qualities. Yet as Katherine Lynes suggests, this man "functions as a cultural object in the poem . . . with contested authenticities," and Johnson's poetry more generally "asserts an authenticity for objects of culture while it simultaneously calls that authenticity into question" by drawing attention to the absence of Black *self*-representation (Lynes, "Contested Authenticities," 518–19). In "Bottled," indeed, the speaker reads the dancer as "authentically" African despite receiving no confirmation of that reading. The poem merely ends with the speaker's patronizing exclamation of pity toward the man, to whom she refers with racial epithets: "But inside– / Gee, that poor shine!" Thus Johnson reveals the African "authenticity" her speaker reads in the man's dance to be, at least partially, the projection of a fantasy. The elliptical dash that interrupts the poem's penultimate line encapsulates how the speaker elides the man's experience of this incident, overdetermining his dancing by imposing Afrocentric topoi onto it. She associates positive affects with these topoi, which allow her to celebrate the man as "[d]ignified," "proud," and "beautiful" (Johnson, "Bottled," 603). But unlike Johnson's speaker in "I Am Not Proud," the man himself may not have chosen the Blackness that the speaker perceives in his dance.

Other poems in Johnson's oeuvre continue to examine spectatorial projection in relation to the New Negro movement's search for folk identity in Africa. In "Poem," Johnson's speaker attends a musical performance in Harlem. The speaker identifies herself explicitly as Black and identifies with the Black musician. Using a strategy similar to the incremental repetition of folk ballads ("Gee, boy . . . "; "Gee, boy, I love the way you . . . "), Johnson has her speaker address the musician directly:

> Gee, boy, when you sing, I can close my ears
> And hear tom-toms just as plain.
> Listen to me, will you, what do I know
> About tom-toms? But I like the word, sort of,
> Don't you? It belongs to us.[49]

With "tom-tom" becoming a new buzzword for Harlem Renaissance writers, signifying the primal energy of Africa, the musician's performance reminds Johnson's speaker of the sound of African drumbeats (Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 165; Parham, "In-Sites of Loss," 445). At the same time, though, the speaker realizes that this sense of Africa is, as Lynes describes the "jungle" in "Bottled," "fictional, imagined, fake" (Lynes, "Contested Authenticities," 521). The speaker in "Poem" suggests that the word, "tom-tom," belongs to the African diaspora at large, but her sense of possession sits in tension with her rhetorical question—"what do I know / About tom-toms?" Johnson indicates the cultural distance between Harlem and a precolonial Africa, underscoring the essentialist fantasy of this folk origin. Not only does the fantasy fail to reflect the speaker's experiences, but it also requires the speaker to "close [her] ears" and thereby obscure certain dimensions of the musician's performance. Still, the speaker recognizes what Miller, in her reading of this poem, has referred to as "the possibility

. . . for social solidarity and the collective reconstruction of an enabling culture" in the African "tom-toms" (Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 240). Johnson allows her speaker to redefine "Africa." She stresses both its status for the speaker as an abstract fantasy and the speaker's tentative yet positive affect—"I like the word, sort of / Don't you?"—in embracing that imperfect abstraction to build connections within a Black community and to assert collective ownership over a shared point of cultural origin. Like "Bottled," "Poem" evokes a subtle anxiety about the power dynamics between artist and audience. It expresses at once a need for the celebratory solidarity that Afrocentric topoi offer and a desire for the expressive cultural "public relations gesture" that conventional forms like the ballad could facilitate: one that manages audience reception while creating alternative opportunities for self-representation within Harlem's artistic community.

In "Advice," Bennett writes from the perspective of the artist, rather than the audience, to complicate the New Negro movement's ideals for poetry and to assert her personal self-determination within that community. This short poem's speaker addresses an unnamed interlocutor, claiming they "bade" her write poetry, "[b]rown poems / Of dark words / And prehistoric rhythms. . . ."[50] She mocks the Harlem Renaissance's attraction—if ambivalent—to tracing its African cultural roots (Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 234). In Hill's reading, Bennett conjures Locke as her speaker's interlocutor; this Lockean figure encourages the speaker "to produce verbal objects in color, works so authentically invested in African American experience that they emerge as '[b]rown' and 'dark.'" For Hill, the speaker ultimately subsumes the interlocutor's advice into her own feminine art form, the "tapestry" she "remember[s]" "[t]hat I would some day weave" and through which "[t]he keen precision of your words" would weave only "a silver thread" (Bennett, "Advice," 509). What Hill calls the speaker's "womanly folk art" in fact reconfigures the relationship between the standardized New Negro ideology and aesthetic and that which is 'feminine' and 'low,' by asserting the primacy of the autonomous woman artist's aesthetic vision—though not rejecting the racialized consciousness altogether (Hill, *Visualizing Blackness*, 97). This aesthetic vision's actualization is deferred to a future "some day" yet it is simultaneously "remembered," already formed in the speaker's mind. Though they address race in a more oblique manner, additional poems in Bennett's oeuvre such as "Fantasy" and "Quatrains" (both 1927) advance a similar argument for Black women's power, particularly in the aesthetic domain (Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, 102; Hill, *Visualizing Blackness*, 98).[51] Like "Heritage," these poems approach ballad meter but maintain some distance from it. This continuity between Bennett's balladic experiments and her assertions of aesthetic power is more than coincidental; the poems collectively evince Bennett's ongoing efforts within the New Negro movement's cultural national project to discover both personally and politically viable forms of poetic expression that privilege introspection, self-discovery, and ongoing dialogue with one's poetic peers over prescribed primitivist essentialisms.

Mastering the Anglo-European ballad form and its elastic generic features offered Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett a means of accessing the folk identity that dialect poems, Afrocentric topoi, or what Honey has referred to as "a modern urban

 vernacular," offered to many of their male contemporaries (Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, 17). For Martin, the ballad is generally the "fabric of a connective, political, and national rhythm [that] begins as a story about a primitive drum" (Martin, "'Imperfectly Civilized,'" 345). It has a particular sound and poetic form that enables it to tell particular stories, which in turn enables the poem to gather community and to build nations. The Anglo-European ballad's "primitive drum," unlike African "tom-toms," allows these women poets to avoid essentializing their race and gender. It also offers them an opportunity to display poetic virtuosity without erasing their race and gender identities.

Their use of the lyric mode foregrounds individual subjectivity and personal feeling. In a letter to James Weldon Johnson, Anne Spencer wrote: "I react to life more as a human being than as a Negro being but I admit the latter is 1927 model. The Tom-Tom forced into poetry seems a sad state to me."[52] Her comment illuminates not only her repudiation of, in Shockley's words, "a commodified black poetry that dealt in exoticism and primitivism," but also her esteem of one's reactions "to life . . . as a human being." Such reactions were undoubtedly important to the three poets whose ballads this article has discussed (Shockley, "Protest/Poetry," 126). Their use of lyric voice and their shared concerns regarding an urgent "here" and "now" testifies to their investment in a Black American identity specifically, rather than a Pan-African or African diasporic identity. In this way, they align themselves with the radical avant-garde faction of Harlem Renaissance artists, which at one point coalesced around the periodical *FIRE!!*. Bennett was a co-founder and editor of this periodical, and both she and Johnson were contributing authors. Hughes's forward to the first and only issue of *FIRE!!* would underscore the "American" in "African-American," rather than the "African." In fact, this avant-garde group broadly did so by distancing themselves from "tom-tom" imagery—though they used the spiritual, rather than the ballad, to achieve this effect.[53] Despite their shared concerns with the avant-garde and even their formal experimentation, Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett have until recently been dismissed as sentimental, apolitical, or read in a way that diminishes their poetry's modernist qualities (Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, 15). Nevertheless, their choices to use the lyrical ballad reinforce a Black American identity and offer a politically potent mode of articulating Black American women's subjectivity.

For these Harlem Renaissance poets and the poets that followed them, the ballad did not create a literary utopia wherein they could resolve the race, gender, and class inequities of their time. Certainly, the ballad would prove fruitful for later Black women poets like Gwendolyn Brooks in her early career, with over fifty ballads in common measure appearing in her corpus. Several other of her poems, such as "The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till" (1960), thematize or evoke the ballad genre while using forms other than the strict ballad quatrain.[54] The form's accessibility and affiliations with Black cultural forms such as spirituals, gospel songs, and the blues made it apt both for "writing about ordinary black folk" and for writing political poetry. But when Brooks became more involved with radical Black liberation movements in the late 1960s, as Karen Jackson Ford notes, "she continued to consider [the ballad] primarily an Anglo European form," and its status in her poetic repertoire became contentious, especially

as a means of addressing racial violence (Ford, "The Last Quatrain," 374, 373). The twentieth-century critical reception of Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett seems to have borne out her intuition. The ballad's ability to communicate their responses to contemporary politics disintegrated over time. While ballad and ballad-adjacent forms appear in diverse geographical locales—from Europe to Africa, the Americas, Australia, and Oceania—the specific traditions on which these poets drew align them with the Anglo-European literary tradition, and the conventionality of this tradition arguably contributed to the relative neglect with which scholars of the Harlem Renaissance treated their poetry until recent decades (Dugaw, "Ballad," 115).

Black women poets of the Harlem Renaissance adhered to bourgeois politics of respectability through the Anglo-European ballad in part to infiltrate New Negro discourse but also, in part, to protect themselves and their families from the gendered and racial violence to which they were vulnerable.[55] In an undated essay, Bennett would describe a 1929 encounter she and her husband had with the Ku Klux Klan in Florida, and later in life she would be "hounded" by investigations into alleged Communist activity by the House Un-American Activities Committee for her work at Works Progress Administration organizations like the Harlem Community Art Center. Such investigations resulted in her suspension from her job in 1941 and eventually her departure from public life.[56] Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett may have, to varying degrees and out of personal necessity, performed the public persona of politically detached 'lady' poet. Their poetry is nonetheless deeply invested in rethinking the Black American nation and their roles in it. While their positions within a complex matrix of early twentieth-century discourses surrounding gender, race, class, and aesthetic form make these investments less legible to readers today, critical frameworks that account for historical reading practices—like ballad reading—can help us better understand the important role these women played in developing the Harlem Renaissance's heterodox modernism.

Notes

1. For an overview of this scholarship, see Maureen Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters: Three Modernist Poets of the Harlem Renaissance* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 15–17. See Lesley Wheeler, "The Formalist Modernism of Edna St. Vincent Millay, Helene Johnson, and Louise Bogan," in *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*, ed. Alfred Bendixen and Stephanie Burt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 628–49, for a recent study addressing Johnson's more conventional verse.

2. Mark A. Sanders, "American Modernism and the New Negro Renaissance," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*, ed. Walter Kalaidjian (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129–56, 130; quoted in Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, 17.

3. Michael Cohen, "Whittier, Ballad Reading, and the Culture of Nineteenth-Century Poetry," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 64, no. 3 (2008): 1–29, 5. For more on "lyricization" and "lyric reading," see Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); and Jackson, "Lyric," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, et al., 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 826–34.

4. See Alain Locke, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (1925; rpt., New York: Touchstone, 1997), xxv–xxvi, 7; and Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 79. See also Meredith McGill, "What Is a Ballad?: Reading for Genre, Format, and Medium," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 71, no. 2 (2016): 156–75, 157, on the ballad's status as both form and genre.

5. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, 56–62. See Margaret Perry, *Silence to the Drums: A Survey of the Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 10–11. See also Lena Hill, *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the African American Literary Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 86, regarding how Black women poets in the Harlem Renaissance would use ekphrasis, or "visual representations[,] in their literary work to drape their often polemical contemplations of race and gender in palatable terms."

6. Cohen, "Ballad Reading," 15; McGill, "What Is a Ballad?," 157, 165, 168, 171, 175; Jane Kuenz, "Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Harlem Renaissance: The Case of Countee Cullen," *Modernism/modernity* 14, no. 3 (2007): 507–15, 509, 513; Jackson, "Specters of the Ballad," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 71, no. 2 (2016): 176–96, 182, 183; George W. Layng, "The Rude Style: Ballads and Contemporary American Poetry" (PhD diss., Tufts University, 1998), 22; Meredith Martin, "'Imperfectly Civilized': Ballads, Nations, and Histories of Form," *ELH* 82, no. 2 (2015): 345–63, 345, 347–50; Amy Moorman Robbins, *American Hybrid Poetics: Gender, Mass Culture, and Form* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 10–11. See also Julian Murphet's "Towards a Gendered Media Ecology," in *Modernism and Masculinity*, ed. Natalya Lusty and Murphet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 53–70, regarding early twentieth-century tendencies to gender mass culture (derogatorily) as feminine.

7. See Maureen Honey, introduction to *Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Maureen Honey (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 1–41, 10, 17, on how women authors affiliated with the Harlem Renaissance wrote in coded ways to avoid alienating white publishers.

8. Nina Miller, *Making Love Modern: The Intimate Public Worlds of New York's Literary Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12.

9. Anne Stavney, "'Mothers of tomorrow': The New Negro Renaissance and the Politics of Maternal Representation," *African American Review* 32, no. 4 (1998): 533–61, 537.

10. Maria Balshaw, "New Negroes, New Women: The Gender Politics of the Harlem Renaissance," *Women: A Cultural Review* 10, no. 2 (1999): 127–38, 128, 130.

11. Stavney, "'Mothers of tomorrow,'" 535; Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, "A Plea for Color: Nella Larsen's Iconography of the Mulatta," *American Literature* 76, no. 4 (2004): 833–69, 835. See also Balshaw, "New Negroes, New Women," 131; Hill, *Visualizing Blackness*, 99–105, regarding women writers' responses to the iconography of Black motherhood that appeared in influential publications like Locke's *New Negro* anthology.

12. While the lyrical ballad may seem distant from a "popular and populist folk tradition," Ford argues, it "retains its cultural associations with the masses even to the present day" (Karen Jackson Ford, "The Last Quatrain: Gwendolyn Brooks and the Ends of Ballads," *Twentieth Century Literature* 56, no. 3 [2010]: 371–95, 373).

13. See Child 20: "The Cruel Mother," in *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Helen Child Sargent and George Lyman Kittredge (Boston, MA and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), 37–39; William Wordsworth, "The Thorn," in *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems* (London: J. & A. Arch, Gracechurch-Street, 1798), 117–32. See also Joanna Brooks, *Why We Left: Untold Stories and Songs of America's First Immigrants* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 15, 167, for discussion of how the ballad fundamentally concerns conflict and records trauma.

14. Georgia Douglas Johnson, "Motherhood," in *Double Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*, ed. Venetria K. Patton and Maureen Honey (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 154.

15. Douglas Johnson, "Black Woman," in *Bronze: A Book of Verse* (1922; rpt., New York: AMS Press, 1975), 43; Michelle Pinkard, "'Don't Knock at My Door, Little Child': The Mantled Poetics of

Georgia Douglas Johnson's Motherhood Poetry," in *Critical Insights: The Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Christopher Allen Varlack (Ipswich, UK: Salem Press, 2015), 217–32, 228; Gwendolyn S. Jones, "Georgia Douglas Johnson (1880?–1966)," in *African American Authors, 1745–1945: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 285. Minor differences between "Motherhood" and "Black Woman" include punctuation changes, one shift of a plural to a singular ("deaf ears" to "deaf-ear"), and two word substitutions ("in" replaces "through" in line 8, and "must not" replaces "cannot" in line 16).

16. See Kristine Yohe, "Enslaved Women's Resistance and Survival Strategies in Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's 'The Slave Mother: A Tale of the Ohio' and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Margaret Garner*," in *Gendered Resistance: Women, Slavery, and the Legacy of Margaret Garner*, ed. Mary E. Frederickson and Delores M. Walters (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 99–130; C. C. O'Brien, "Cosmopolitanism in Georgia Douglas Johnson's Anti-Lynching Literature," *African American Review* 38, no. 4 (2004): 581–84. This tradition emerged in response to narratives surrounding Margaret Garner; this story of maternal infanticide also inspired Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). See O'Brien on Douglas Johnson's treatment of this trope in her anti-lynching plays.

17. See Patton and Honey's introduction and "Chronology," in *Double Take*, xxi, xliii; A Yẹmisi Jimoh, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Writing during the Early New Negro Era," *College Literature: A Journal of Critical Literary Studies* 32, no. 3 (2015): 488–524, 489.

18. Miller also describes women's lyric poetry as running "to one side of the genteel modernity of the largely male establishment," which aligns with my reading of how Douglas Johnson, Johnson, and Bennett revise New Negro womanhood (Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 9, 145).

19. See Clare Corbould, *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919–1939* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 10–13; Ira Dworkin, "'Near the Congo': Langston Hughes and the Geopolitics of Internationalist Poetry," *American Literary History* 24, no. 4 (2012): 631–57, 633; and Marisa Parham, "Hughes, Cullen, and the In-Sites of Loss," *ELH* 74, no. 2 (2007): 430–33, on how investment in Africa as a site of origin could operate as a means for Black Americans to articulate their own identity in opposition to white discourse, to critique European colonialism in Africa, or to express the loss that Africa might represent for them.

20. Kuenz, "Case of Countee Cullen," 513, 509; Sonya Posmentier, *Cultivation and Catastrophe: The Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 35. See Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, 85, for how Cullen and McKay's poetry was seen as particularly British.

21. Helene Johnson, "Cui Bono?," in *This Waiting for Love: Helene Johnson, Poet of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Verner D. Mitchell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 44.

22. Diane Dugaw, "Ballad," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 118.

23. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 141.

24. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 10th ed. (1957; rpt., Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012), 23.

25. Cohen, "Ballad Reading," 4, 24; Abrams and Harpham, *Glossary*, 23–24; Dugaw, "Ballad," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 114; Brooks, *Why We Left*, 3, 2, 13–4. Abrams and Dugaw note that scholars uphold this distinction between "traditional" or narrative ("folk") and "literary" ("lyrical") ballads to differentiate between oral compositions thought to have originated in the Middle Ages and individually authored verse compositions that imitate the form and style of traditional ballads. See Brooks regarding how English folk ballads first arrived in North America with English laboring-class migrants and survived in popular memory.

26. Jahan Ramazani, "Lyric Poetry: Intergeneric, Transnational, Translingual?," *Journal of Literary Theory* 11, no. 1 (2017): 97–107, 102.

27. Dugaw, "Ballad Meter, Hymn Meter," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 119.

28. O. B. Hardison, T. V. F. Brogan, S. S. Bill, "Fourteener," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 504.

29. See Douglas Johnson, "Wishes," in *Double Take*, 156, and "Prejudice" (discussed later in this article) for additional examples of Douglas Johnson's use of the fourteener.

30. Sherrard-Johnson, "A Plea for Color," 835. See Sherrard-Johnson's discussion of Archibald Motley's paintings for more information on this iconography.

31. Barbara Foley, *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 41.

32. Douglas Johnson, "Octoroon," in *Double Take*, 154.

33. Gwendolyn Bennett, "Heritage," in *Double Take*, 508.

34. *OED Online*, s.v. "minstrel *(n)*," June 2019, oed.com/view/Entry/118957. See *Heroine of the Harlem Renaissance and Beyond: Gwendolyn Bennett's Selected Writings*, ed. Belinda Wheeler and Louis J. Parascandola (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 21–22, for more on the history of minstrelsy as "a brutal form of racial domination."

35. See Corbould, *Becoming African Americans*, 58, concerning the impact of early twentieth-century archaeological excavations, e.g., the 1922 excavation of Tutankhamen's tomb, on Black public life in the United States. Growing knowledge about ancient Egyptian civilization enabled Black Americans to "refute common perceptions that they were a people with no history" and to delegitimize, through this counter-history, the racial hierarchies that presumed Black people's inferiority based on this supposed lack.

36. Belinda Wheeler, "Gwendolyn Bennett: A Leading Voice of the Harlem Renaissance," in *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Sherrard-Johnson (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 203–17, 208; William J. Maxwell and Joseph Valente, "On 'Heritage,'" *Modern American Poetry*, modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/william-j-maxwell-and-joseph-valente-heritage. See also *Heroine*, 22. Although Wheeler does acknowledge the ambivalence that I read in this poem's conclusion, Maxwell and Valente emphasize it more forcefully.

37. Johnson, "I Am Not Proud," in *This Waiting for Love*, 45. See Johnson, "Why Do They Prate?," in *This Waiting for Love*, 53, from 1929 for similar use of a single ballad stanza.

38. *OED Online*, s.v. "gage *(n.2)*," June 2019, oed.com/view/Entry/76016.

39. Ronald Primeau, "Frank Horne and the Second Echelon Poets of the Harlem Renaissance," in *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered: Essays Edited with a Memoir*, ed. Arna Bontemps (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972), 247–67, 265–66. See also Honey, introduction to *Shadowed Dreams*, 7, on the appeal of the British Romantics to Harlem Renaissance writers generally.

40. Evie Shockley, "Protest/Poetry: Anne Spencer's Garden of 'Raceless' Verse," in *Renegade Poetics: Black Aesthetics and Formal Innovation in African American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 121–44, 132, 128; Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, 15. This section's title follows the example of Shockley's ironic reference to Spencer's "raceless" verse.

41. See Foley, *Spectres of 1919*, 146, regarding the organic trope that this essay will later discuss.

42. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 9th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 2:487–99, 2:492. See chapter 14 (pages 491–96) for Coleridge's famous description of the *Lyrical Ballads*'s origins.

43. Douglas Johnson, "Prejudice," in *Bronze*, 29, emphasis in original.

44. Robert W. Thurston, *Lynching: American Mob Murder in Global Perspective* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 6. Thurston acknowledges that lynch mobs at this time used additional methods of murder beyond hanging. For this article, though, the specific context of lynching by hanging is most pertinent.

45. Douglas O. Linder, "Lynchings: By Year and Race," *Famous Trials*, famous-trials.com/sheriffshipp/1084-lynchingsyea. I am indebted to Shockley, "Protest/Poetry," 132, for the Linder source; the Tuskegee Institute Archives have provided statistics.

46. See also Foley, *Jean Toomer: Race, Repression, and Revolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), for further elaboration on the organic trope.

47. Helene Johnson, "Bottled," in in *Double Take*, 602.

48. Katherine R. Lynes, "'A real honest-to-cripe jungle': Contested Authenticities in Helene Johnson's 'Bottled,'" *Modernism/modernity* 14, no. 3 (2007): 517–25, 520, 522.

49. Helene Johnson, "Poem," in *Double Take*, 604.

50. Gwendolyn Bennett, "Advice," in *Double Take*, 509.

51. Bennett, "Fantasy," in *Double Take*, 510; Bennett, "Quatrains," in *Heroine*, 32; Cheryl A. Wall, *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), xiii–xiv.

52. Anne Spencer to James Weldon Johnson, undated, JWJ MSS 49, box 19, folder 449, James Weldon Johnson and Grace Nail Johnson Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, emphasis in original; quoted in Shockley, "Protest/Poetry," 126. Permission to quote from Anne Spencer's letters is courtesy of the Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum, Inc. Archives.

53. Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 165, 170–71; Walter C. Daniel and Sandra Y. Govan, "Gwendolyn Bennett (1902–1981)," in *Afro-American Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940*, ed. Trudier Harris and Thadious M. Davis (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1987), 3–10, 4.

54. Ford, "The Last Quatrain," 373–74. Note that there is also a broader, cross-gender tradition of Black poets writing ballads in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including Weldon Johnson, Hughes, Toomer, Sterling Brown, Robert Hayden, Etheridge Knight, Douglas Kearney, and Terrance Hayes.

55. Harlem Renaissance–era poets—especially those who lived in the South—would have been aware of Ida B. Wells's 1892 exile from Memphis, Tennessee, resulting from her editorials about the rape of Black women by white men who go unpunished and more generally about "the power dynamics underwriting interracial sexuality" (Shockley, "Protest/Poetry," 132).

56. See *Heroine*, 14–16, 109, 162–65, 193, 210; Daniel and Govan, "Gwendolyn Bennett," 9; Sandra Y. Govan, "A Blend of Voices: Composite Narrative Strategies in Biographical Reconstruction," in *Recovered Writers/Recovered Texts: Race, Class, and Gender in Black Women's Literature*, ed. Dolan Hubbard (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 99–104, 102; "Gwendolyn Bennett (1902–1981)," in *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*, ed. Cary Nelson, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1:629–34, 1:629.