

## Gender and race in the modernist middlebrow

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# GENDER AND RACE IN THE MODERNIST MIDDLEBROW

*louise faure-favier's blanche et noir*

Louise Hardwick

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In 1926, Man Ray published an image in French *Vogue* which became a “modernist icon with a celebrity status rare for a photograph” (Grossman and Manford 134). Known today by the feminized title *Noire et blanche* (*Black Woman and White Woman*), the shot stages a white female model – none other than Kiki de Montparnasse, Man Ray’s muse and lover – posing in a state of sleep or unconsciousness while holding an African mask. Whereas Kiki’s white head rests on a table as it might on a pillow, the black mask is held straight up at a right angle, conferring the impression of alertness. She holds the mask erect with her left hand which, rather unnaturally, grips the mask from the top, pushing it rigidly down onto the table. This positioning forces her naked shoulder and arm into the field of vision and thereby suggests her complete nudity, concealed only by the table. The title *Noire et blanche* positions the photograph as an erotic doubling of female consciousness, and evokes the modernist vogue for lesbianism (Benjamin 90), yet the image was originally printed with the title “Visage de nacre et masque d’ébène” (Mother-of-pearl face and ebony mask), a gender-neutral description which allows for a wider field of interpretation.

Man Ray’s suggestive juxtaposition of an alabaster-white woman against a black “primitive” African mask is a play with colour, perception, consciousness, and latent desire. Exemplifying the surrealist preoccupation with dreams, the uncanny, and doubling, the photograph evokes both consciousness and unconsciousness, while the *Vogue* caption’s emphasis on

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*louise faure-favier’s*  
**blanche et noir**

surface, patina, and sheen – “mother-of-pearl” and “ebony” – foregrounds the modernist obsession with *pure surface*, a phenomenon compellingly analysed in Anne Anlin Cheng’s interdisciplinary study of Josephine Baker and modernism. From the outset, confusion existed surrounding Man Ray’s intended title for the photograph, but as early as 1928, European journal reprints were using titles which “pared down” the original to focus on white and black (Grossman and Manford 140), resulting in the title by which the work is now known, *Noire et blanche*. Man Ray also released the

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negative of the image, a startling reversal in which Kiki's face becomes black, while a bright luminescence emanates from her hair: both the top of her head – the traditional seat of the mind – and the mask now become united, bathed in an ethereal glowing white light, suggestive of a link between the black mask and the white unconscious mind. Man Ray's photographic play with consciousness, colour, and cultures foregrounds a modernist preoccupation with race and gender which, just two years later, would find urgent and equally transgressive expression in the novel *Blanche et Noir*<sup>1</sup> (*White Woman and Black Man*)<sup>2</sup> by the journalist, aviation pioneer, and author Louise Faure-Favier.

Faure-Favier's *Blanche et Noir* opens with a blunt, scandalous statement of fact: "Mon oncle nègre est le fils de ma grand-mère et le frère de mon père" (My negro uncle is my grandmother's son, and my father's brother; 5). Yet despite the appearance of straightforward, empirical knowledge, this statement conceals more than it reveals. The young narrator, Jeanne Lortac-Rieux, nurtures an obsessive desire to understand the circumstances – material and emotional – which led her grandmother Malvina Rieux to give birth to Jeanne's "oncle nègre" in Senegal. In a detail which suggests the unusual faux-twin bond between the niece and uncle, the narrative has them born in different continents, on the same day: 1 July 1890. In Faure-Favier's novel, the term "nègre" is used interchangeably to refer to black and mixed-race people, without pejorative intentions or connotations (apart from in passages of indirect speech which are included in the narrative to hold casual French racism up to ridicule; see, for example, 56–57). This is illustrative of the 1920s (partial) rehabilitation of the fraught term, as in *l'art nègre* (Negro Art). Nonetheless, such use of the term, in line with the novel's subject matter itself, presented a deliberate challenge and demonstrates Faure-Favier's radical and daring stance.<sup>3</sup>

*Blanche et Noir* examines gender and race with attention to women's desire – particularly unconventional, be it sexual or the desire for

adventure – against the backdrop of a rapidly changing France which is undergoing a process of constant renewal and transformation through the advent of bicycles, railways, and air travel. The novel relishes in witnessing the collapse of old notions of spatial distance and time as new technologies emerge, yet as this article will demonstrate, the narrative also performs something of a temporal sleight-of-hand to suggest an alternative vision of the present, and for the future, a technique the author used throughout her novels. Faure-Favier was living in Paris and organizing a literary *salon* when Henri Bergson's Sorbonne lectures were causing a sensation;<sup>4</sup> her entire literary œuvre sits in a loose relationship with the philosopher through its rethinking of time and space, a pronounced interest in perception and consciousness, and their shared expectation that an artist must use his or her perceptive abilities to present their own original experiences or visions of life. *Blanche et Noir* advances an intersectional anti-racist discourse which unsettles and destabilizes modernism's focus on primitivism, in addition to providing a rare example of a woman writing expertly about cutting-edge technology. In Faure-Favier's novel and her wider publications on civil aviation, the technical and aesthetic achievement represented by the aeroplane can be seen to follow a Bergsonian logic, removing those who experience it from the habitual world and transporting them to a more vital state, thus facilitating an experiential, sensory awakening that was otherwise dulled by the crushing requirements of everyday life. Faure-Favier dares to imagine that this new liberating vision will bring about more egalitarian relations between people of different genders and races.

### finding her wings

Although never a licensed pilot, Faure-Favier was a leading figure at the dawn of commercial aviation. From 1921, she published a series of the first official French aviation guidebooks covering destinations such as London, Tunis, and Lausanne and receiving praise from the *Académie Française* (De Freitas x).<sup>5</sup> She also

set a number of speed records, the first of which, in 1919 for Paris to Dakar, demonstrates her first-hand knowledge of flight routes to Senegal; this was exceptional at a time when only colonial wives (and even then, relatively rarely) were granted access to African spaces, in circumstances arising out of duty rather than choice.<sup>6</sup>

In 1922, Faure-Favier was on board the first return commercial night flight between Paris and London, and she published a characteristically enthusiastic account in *L'Illustration*. Journalism allowed the author to develop her passion for aviation and emphasize its specific potential for women, as evident from her articles on the aviatrix Adrienne Bolland (1895–1975). Bolland's winning combination of daredevilry, aeronautical expertise, and photogenic looks had made her a favourite with male plane manufacturers who employed her to move aircraft from site to site – she was also famous for her accomplished loop the loops (Reynolds 68). In 1920, Faure-Favier, in her role as a reporter for *La Vie Aérienne*, became Bolland's first passenger in a flight which may well have marked, as the publication suggested, “le premier équipage féminin d'avion” (the first all-female aviation crew; Arnold-Tétard 39). One year later, Faure-Favier wrote an article championing Bolland's achievement in becoming the first woman to fly over the Andes (“Une Héroïne de l'air” 363). In *Blanche et Noir*, the twin preoccupations of the lure of distant lands and the female agency which aviation seemed destined to unlock, propel the “autofiction” (Little, “Autofiction” 2–4): Jeanne becomes an aviation reporter, and the air route between France and Senegal of which Faure-Favier had first-hand knowledge is crucial to the final *dénouement* when the Senegalese uncle, François Laobé-Rieux, flies into the narrative – quite literally – to reveal his name and present his own account of events: a debonair twist, which leads Roger Little to suggest that François may be fiction's first black pilot (“François Laobé-Rieux”).

Back down on terra firma, art mirrored life as Faure-Favier set a number of cultural firsts and

became connected with several leading figures of modernism. She was a close friend of Apollinaire during his relationship with the cubist artist Marie Laurencin, and remained in touch with the poet until his untimely death in 1918 (Jacquet-Pfau 10–14), and with Laurencin until the end of their lives. Faure-Favier and her second husband Jean Ernest-Charles ran the journal *Le Censeur politique et littéraire* (1906–08), and in 1914, shortly after their divorce (her second), the *salon* held at her Parisian apartment reached its zenith: she was in contact with André Billy, Satie, Cocteau, Picasso (De Freitas viii), as well as Rachilde and Cendrars.<sup>7</sup> Faure-Favier's journalistic output was prolific, and she produced articles, reviews, and essays on a wide range of cultural topics for publications such as *L'Illustration*, *Paris-Midi*, *Le Temps moderne*, and *Mercure de France*. Her review of the Stravinsky–Matisse ballet collaboration *Le Chant du rossignol* continues to shape interdisciplinary understandings of modernism on stage (Bellow 167–208).

In two novels published in the 1920s, Faure-Favier's passions for modernism and aviation intertwine to set a number of firsts: the literary equivalent of her record-setting in the skies. *Les Chevaliers de l'air* (*Knights of the Skies*, 1924) is the first novel about civil aviation, and *Blanche et Noir* (1928; originally serialized in *Le Figaro* in 1927) is the first French novel about a mixed-race relationship between a white woman and a black man.<sup>8</sup> Both works are significant for their demonstration of a wider “association between flying and feminism” which was evident in 1920s France and Britain (Hopkins 140). Hopkins draws attention to the ways in which this connection is compellingly stated by Susan Ware in her study *Still Missing: Amelia Earhart and the Search for Modern Feminism* (1994). Indeed, Ware notes the emergence of the new term “air-minded,” indicative of the nascent hope that “aviation would reorder human society and promote world peace [...] When everyone took to the air, society would be transformed along the lines of democracy, freedom and equality – and perhaps even women's

liberation” (62). Elite white women were embracing this new world view on both sides of the channel; in a 1928 publication on gender equality, the Irish-born aviator Lady Heath invokes a particularly gendered form of privilege and provocation through the ditty “woman’s place is in the home, but failing that the aerodrome” (62). Despite the demonstrable wider cultural valence of Faure-Favier’s works, by 2005, Little, the critic who has done the most to recover the author’s memory, could only sigh that *Blanche et Noir* had been “relégué aux oubliettes” (condemned to be forgotten; “François Laobé-Rieux” 128). This claim of neglect was exact, if somewhat coy; Little was on the cusp of rescuing the novel from obscurity by bringing out a new edition in his series *Autrement mêmes* (2006). Such claims of neglect hold for the author, too. Faure-Favier was a pioneer of air travel and the cultural theorization of aviation, making compelling connections between aesthetics and technology such as: “le vrai cubisme, c’est l’aviation qui le [...] révélera” (true cubism will be revealed by aviation; No Title 3).<sup>9</sup> Yet despite her conviction that aviation must inevitably lead to new forms of consciousness and perception, Faure-Favier herself simply ceased to be seen.

### “vain scouting mission”

In recent decades, a groundswell of work has examined the persistent, deliberate exclusion of women writers from the literary canon. Jennifer E. Milligan’s 1996 survey *The Forgotten Generation: French Women Writers of the Inter-war Period* makes an urgent case for the readmission of female modernist authors into French literary history, and is written under the banner of Louise Bernikow’s acerbic remark that “when women writers were lost *someone lost them*” (34; original emphasis; cited in Milligan 40). Milligan argues that the continued focus on an “elite core” of authors such as Noailles, Colette, Rachilde, and Youcenar, “fail[s] to provide an informed, accurate and comprehensive overview of writing in the era” while also working to thwart “any sense

of collective identity or continuity in women’s writing in its entirety” (5). Intriguingly, in her meticulously excavated landscape of the women writers whom she terms the *Forgotten Generation*,<sup>10</sup> there is no mention of Faure-Favier. Diana Holmes’s landmark study *Middlebrow Matters: Women’s Reading and the Literary Canon in France Since the Belle Epoque* (2018) builds explicitly on Milligan and other feminist critics to capture a more complete picture of writing women in the first half of the twentieth century. She includes the canonical, through Colette and the recently rediscovered writer Irène Némirovsky, placed alongside lost interwar novelists such as Germaine Acremant and Marcelle Tinayre. Although many authors in the study are Faure-Favier’s contemporaries, once again, she herself remains absent.<sup>11</sup>

Milligan points out the practical barriers to recovery which arise because “access to primary material itself is complicated [...] the *dépôt légal* system was not fully operational in the 1920s” (3); this same concern over lack of accessibility is raised in the context of English modernist women’s writing in a study of the Oxford “Somerville College novelists” by Leonardi (12). A far more insidious force, however, is the sustained disdain of the critical establishment, united in their conviction that in the interwar period, “few French women writers produced literature of sufficient calibre to merit detailed study” (Milligan 2). Such derision, Milligan argues, is exemplified by Cixous’s “The Laugh of the Medusa,” which scathingly dismisses the very act of searching for lost women writers as a “vain scouting mission” (Cixous et al. 1976, 878, qtd in Milligan 2). As a result of this resolute critical disparagement of any efforts to excavate lost archival material, French women’s writing in the early twentieth century is “habitually portrayed as being stagnant, sterile and silent” (Milligan 3). Holmes also draws attention to the gaps and silences which characterize the understanding of women’s writing of this period, and deepens the critical line of enquiry to examine the “gendered dimension of cultural hierarchies” which has persistently

excluded women writers – and readers – from definitions of “high culture” (9). Deploying Bourdieu, Holmes demonstrates how *high* comes to be associated with “masculine” concepts of culture, intellect, and emotional sobriety, while *low* becomes a byword for popular “feminized” forms of culture: instinctive, bodily, and sentimental; what ensues is the inevitable “relegation of women’s writing to lowbrow status on the grounds that it deals with the domestic and the emotional,” further compounded by a form of structural discrimination through “the rejection of immersive storytelling as a legitimate literary goal” (9). These explicit denunciations of the pernicious forces which have conspired to silence French women writers are reminiscent of *How to Suppress Women’s Writing* by the feminist critic Joanna Russ (1983), a sarcastic, loaded, and scathing dissection of the strategies employed to discredit female efforts to create.

Holmes’s work argues for a middlebrow turn in French scholarship, pointing out that research into the middlebrow has thus far largely been restricted to research into “women’s writing and reading practices in interwar Britain and North America” (*Middlebrow Matters* 91). The term itself originated in the 1920s, partly in response to increased patterns of female cultural consumption and the emergence of a new type of novel seen to cater to this market, which was situated between “trashy romance or thriller on the one hand, and the philosophically or formally challenging novel on the other” (11). In a separate article, Holmes (“Introduction”) identifies three pillars of French middlebrow literature, all of which are in evidence in Faure-Favier’s novel: *referentiality*, with a deliberately realistic geographic and social context; *didacticism*, through the work’s evident aim to instruct and improve understandings of gender and race; and *narrative optimism*, evident in the novel’s conviction that for women and black people, the future holds the promise of improvements in status. This optimism also underpins the general modernizing thrust which propels the narrative into a better future, peppered as it is with references to the

advent of bicycles, electricity, the Eiffel Tower, trains, aeroplanes, education, the improvement in conditions of the white French peasantry, and so on. The novel features a linear plot, sustained suspense, and a surprise *dénouement*, all traditionally associated with the “immersive” nature of middlebrow literature; nonetheless, it also plays with expectations in its refusal to turn into a tale of romance. Engaged, married, and widowed by a doomed wartime love affair which occupies the space of only one paragraph (Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 111),<sup>12</sup> Jeanne’s true passion, it emerges, is for adventure, and she appears on course to achieve this through the strategic combination of her professional activities in journalism and aviation.

To associate this new middlebrow with lesser literature, then, is to fail to attend to the socio-cultural forces which have cultivated disdain for anything but literature which espouses the high approach, and is an attitude which risks perpetuating hierarchies in which women authors are always-already assigned the lower rungs. What is at stake here is, broadly speaking, a dynamic aligned with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “brow-elevation level” (12). A further decisive and urgent aspect of middlebrow scholarship has been to expand the field of study beyond prose fiction or poetry to include analyses of print journalism, including glossy magazines, areas in which women have frequently held leading roles and made prolific contributions (see, for example, Hammill and Smith). In reclaiming a thinker as prolific and protean as Faure-Favier, who made enormous contributions to travel literature and women’s magazines, the middlebrow offers a potent framework for analysis and recovery.

Faure-Favier does appear at the margins of feminist scholarship on interwar France, notably in the historian Jennifer Anne Boittin’s interwar study of anti-imperialist and feminist activities in Paris (2010), which examines police archives, journal publications, and networks of activism to illustrate the emergence of an intersectional current of French women’s writing on race in the 1920s and 1930s. Boittin draws attention to a



contemporary review of *Blanche et Noir* by Maxime Revon in *L'Ami du peuple*, a right-wing newspaper published in Paris.<sup>13</sup> *L'Ami du peuple* was a daily owned by François Coty, the billionaire perfumer turned press baron, who also owned *Le Figaro*; by launching *L'Ami du peuple* in 1928 (not to be confused with Marat's publication of the same title which appeared during the French Revolution), Coty aimed to "lure the working class from communist leanings" (Toledano and Coty 148). According to *Retronews*, the official press site of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, *L'Ami du peuple* was "ouvertement xénophobe, antisémite et nationaliste" (overtly xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and nationalist).<sup>14</sup> Revon sardonically concludes that the figure of François demonstrates how "a good-looking nègre, elegant and well-groomed, and especially one who has a well-kept plane, is more seductive than a little white runt" (qtd in English in Boittin 73). At the other end of the political spectrum is a review by Pierre Baye-Salzmann in the left-wing newspaper *La Dépêche africaine* which welcomed the novel's anti-racist and humanist vision; at the time, Faure-Favier wrote a letter of thanks to the editors, emphatically proclaiming the humanist, anti-racist, and feminist thought underpinning her novel, which was in turn published by the newspaper (Little, "Letter on Blacks"). Yet such recognition was not enough to keep her work in the public eye or to ensure sustained scholarly attention.

Nonetheless, in recent times Faure-Favier has attracted brief attention from Robert Wohl, a leading cultural historian of aviation, who accords her a curiously lengthy footnote in his survey *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination* (2005). Restricting his focus to *Les Chevaliers de l'air*, Wohl concedes that the novel demonstrates a firm knowledge of the early 1920s French aviation context, before deriding Faure-Favier for "a style that makes Danielle Steele appear, in comparison, a master of prose" (*Spectacle of Flight* 338–39). No reference is made to Faure-Favier's other novels or to her numerous pioneering essays offering the earliest theorization

of aviation's cultural impact (for example, "Le Romantisme littéraire"; "Aviation et littérature"). Wohl then unequivocally interprets Faure-Favier's omission in 1929 from a lengthy review of aviation in literature by Maurice Martin du Gard as evidence of her contemporary literary insignificance, noting that this was "a slight which must have been painful" (339). No consideration is made of the distinct networks in which Faure-Favier operated and had won significant acclaim, nor does Wohl acknowledge the "extreme misogyny" of the French post-war era which would have further worked to thwart any acts of literary recovery (Holmes, *Middlebrow Matters* 125). Having thus framed Faure-Favier as a woman scorned, in a final *coup de grâce*, Wohl remarks that she was "ungifted for fiction if persistent in its practice," and "at her best when writing 'aerial guide books'" (*Spectacle of Flight* 339).

Although Wohl's study approaches 400 pages, no reference is made to *Blanche et Noir*, nor does it mention Bolland.<sup>15</sup> Instead, it waxes lyrical about figures such as the proto-fascist Italian author Gabriele D'Annunzio ("As he so often did, D'Annunzio was moved to associate war with literature and erotic pleasure"; Wohl, *Spectacle of Flight* 54) and the French author Kessel ("Money, mistresses, the Légion d'honneur, and the literary Grand Prix of the French Academy soon came his way"; 163). Wohl praises D'Annunzio and Kessel for the creation of brash male pilot heroes who combine derring-do with the most implausible romantic entanglements. In Kessel, a fighter pilot is wracked by guilt at the discovery that his mistress is none other than the wife of his esteemed co-pilot – a melodramatic twist worthy of Danielle Steele, although now, Wohl fails to make the connection. Privileging a masculine appropriation of aviation, Wohl reduces Faure-Favier's complex yet decidedly less virile narratives to a single, cautionary footnote. Women, should they dare write about aviation, had better know their limits: and so after deriding her attempts to write prose fiction, Wohl condescends to acknowledge that Faure-Favier's



guidebooks have some enduring value. This incomplete, damning account of Faure-Favier's literary activities offers an illustration of the nefarious dynamics of Bernikow's *someone lost them*, writ large. It also demonstrates the timeliness and urgency of the project to recover Faure-Favier.

### gender and race in *blanche et noir*

At the time Faure-Favier wrote her novel, abundant titles by male authors about transgressive relationships between white men and black women were in circulation: in 1928 alone, Louis-Charles Royer's *La Maîtresse noire* (*The Black Mistress*), a titillating perpetuation of patriarchal colonial stereotypes – a number of illustrated editions were also available – was a publication sensation. But women writers were also experimenting with race, with very different results. In 1920, Lucie Cousturier published her account of the Senegalese *tirailleurs*<sup>16</sup> who had been stationed in France during the First World War, followed by a sequel documenting a voyage made to Senegal at the behest of the French colonial authorities so she might prepare a report of the Senegalese as they lived in Senegal (1925). These publications were compassionate accounts of other cultures, which nonetheless articulate the limitations and contradictions of the time: Cousturier argues that wealth, education, and the creation of a local elite will be required not only to benefit the colonized, but also to secure the future of French colonialism (Boittin 194) – an argument which also surfaces in Faure-Favier's novel and which is explored at length later in this article.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the humanizing impulse exhibited by Cousturier and Faure-Favier stands the German author Claire Goll's *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa* (1925),<sup>18</sup> the first novel to explore the marriage between a white French woman and a black Senegalese man. An adaptation of the classical myth of Jupiter and Europa, Goll's novel presents a union increasingly marked by unhappiness and volatility, and ends with the murder of

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the white woman at the hands of her black husband. Although the work offers some critique of intersectional racial-classist-sexual politics in its exploration of the dynamic between a lower-class white woman and her older, wealthier, aristocratic black husband, it does so largely in a manner which relies on “crude over-simplifications, polarisations and projections” (McGowan 209), and serves to confirm, rather than challenge, the apparent inevitability of pernicious, racist colonial stereotypes.

Faure-Favier's novel departs from Cousturier and Goll, and could not be further from the sensational works by male authors. Faure-Favier builds her anti-racist critique through a characteristic play with time and perception which offers the opportunity to engage critically with race, and as a result, to see contemporary society anew. Past attitudes are held up as relics of a bygone era, symbolized through an intertext, *Histoire des Voyages, revu et corrigé par E.-C. Piton* (*History of Voyages, Reviewed and Corrected by E.-C. Piton*; this full title is given in the novel; Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 24) originally published by Jean-François de La Harpe, a contemporary of Voltaire.<sup>19</sup> Whole passages from de La Harpe's synthesis of colonial journeys and distant civilizations are quoted in the first part of the novel. Rather than undermining African culture, or marking it as Oriental and unknowable, it is Jeanne whose childish interpretations border on the ridiculous when she begins to act out scenes from the book in her playroom. At confession, the guilty nagging feeling that her curiosity about other cultures is transgressive prompts her to the maladroit admission that she has “joué au nègre” (played at negroes; 32), the meaning of which a well-meaning priest has to extract from her befuddled child's mind. Her exaggerated acting out of common tropes of colonialism functions as a source of humour – and the joke is always on Jeanne and wider conservative French society. Her neighbours, elderly women, could not be more alarmed when they overhear her yelling “Que l'on distribue la kola aux danseuses et que l'on commence le

tam-tam!” (Let the dancers have their kola, and begin the tam-tam!; 35), and this phase in her development reaches an unfortunate climax when, playing with friends, she orchestrates a carnivalesque scene of “anthropophagie” which descends into fisticuffs (37). Nonetheless, de La Harpe also prompts Jeanne to more serious reflections: on the death of her maternal grandmother, she contrasts the Western tradition of burial with the description of an African cremation (39–40), which she judges to be simpler, nobler, and – with a dash of irony – more economical; this after an uncomfortable episode in which a coffin-maker tries to up-sell her parents from an oak to a walnut casket. She is also prompted to muse on the ironic mirroring found in patterns of mourning: white people clad themselves in black, while in black African cultures, mourners wear white and even whiten their skin (40). Through de La Harpe, Jeanne achieves a critical distance vis-à-vis the traditions of her own society, and identifies subversive black/white reversals which call to mind Man Ray’s visual play with race.

In addition, sexualized racist stereotypes are also deftly defused by Faure-Favier. A fascination with the cliché of black male sexual superiority is shown to underpin much of the village gossip about Malvina which is still circulating in Jeanne’s childhood and adolescence; over a decade after the event, a quip about her grandmother’s “noire inconduite” (dark misconduct; Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 42) still provokes raucous laughter. Such clichés of black sexual prowess are presented in the narrative as repetitive, unoriginal, and suggestive of the hypocritical sexual repression of bourgeois French society, and Jeanne remains convinced that her grandmother’s actions cannot be explained by prurient remarks. This anti-racist conviction in the dignity of black peoples runs through the text: in a later episode, Jeanne, now a student in Paris, instigates a discussion on race relations in the United States with an exchange student from Washington who voices the most abject racial slurs, leaving the narrator stupefied and quietly convinced of the importance of her

own opposing “sentiment d’humanité” (conviction in humanity; 108). Through such juxtaposition of American and French racial discourse, the latter emerges as enlightened precisely due to the French Republican conviction – at least, theoretically – in a shared humanity; a humanity which the American model obsessively disavows. It is this shared humanity which comes to the fore in the depiction of Malvina and her African husband.

*Blanche et Noir*, then, urges for racial and cultural openness, and the novel insists on the agency of colonized peoples. By operating within a family framework, the novel tracks the development of colonial agency across two generations, from the Senegalese man Samba Laobé Thiam to his mixed-race son, François. White men had undertaken relationships with black women since the dawn of colonialism, whereas at the turn-of-the-century, the cultural taboo of white women and black men remained an “impensable absolu” (absolutely unthinkable; Seillan 80, qtd in Little, “Introduction: Une autofiction bicolore” xxii).<sup>20</sup> Faure-Favier orchestrates a plausible context for Malvina’s encounter with Samba by setting this part of her novel at the Universal Exhibition of 1889. The newly erected Eiffel Tower loomed over the Exhibition, while at ground level, French citizens marvelled and recoiled at the human bodies from other cultures placed on display for their entertainment in what would become a staple feature of such cultural exhibitions across France in future: the *Village sénégalais* (Senegalese Village). Faure-Favier’s narrative, in common with other narratives of her time, does not pause to consider the degradation inherent in this spectacle of human beings on parade. In recent years, a number of landmark studies have analysed the phenomenon of the human zoo across Western societies, advancing an urgent postcolonial discourse on an international cultural phenomenon which endured over a period of about sixty years. In the French context, publications led by interdisciplinary teams of researchers such as *Zoos humains: aux temps des expositions humaines* (Boëtsch et al.; revised and translated into English, 2009) have shaped a new postcolonial

understanding of the human zoo, which in turn has led to brief renewed interest in Faure-Favier's novel (Robles).

As Walter Putnam observes, any zoo is "a simulacrum, pure and simple" (61). In the case of the French colonial exhibition of 1889, this involved transplanting approximately 400 Africans to live in reconstructed villages at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, of which the most prominent was the Senegalese Village. "Primitivism" was thus framed by the shadow of the towering phallus intended to symbolize French progress and domination. From the juxtaposition of these "anachronistic spaces" with French contemporary society (McClintock qtd in Putnam 63), it appeared to the viewing public that these displays represented hierarchical taxonomies of race which confirmed white superiority, whereas in reality, this was a carefully orchestrated staging of "European fantasies or phantasms" of the other (Putnam 63).

Faure-Favier was eighteen at the time of the *Exposition universelle*. Due to the paucity of biographical information available, it is unknown whether she visited the exhibition in person. Little has, however, established that another important, although unacknowledged, intertext which informs *Blanche et Noir* is Louis Rousselet's comprehensive account of the 1889 exhibition (1890): indeed, as Little has pointed out, the name and occupation of Samba Laobé Thiam are lifted directly from Rousselet (Little, "Introduction: Une autofiction bicolor" xix). The gradual rediscovery of Faure-Favier's novel has also revealed connections with journalistic archival material from 1889 in which direct speech is attributed to the real Samba Laobé Thiam – who strongly objects to the humiliation of being placed on display (Little, "Introduction: Une autofiction bicolor" xviii).<sup>21</sup> In the course of preparing this article, digital archival research has indicated that Samba Laobé Thiam received a considerable amount of coverage in print and visual culture, and I have identified two portrait photographs taken by Prince Roland Bonaparte at the 1889 exhibition.<sup>22</sup> A confident subject with a flamboyant air, Samba is photographed twice, front and side, a scientific approach which frames him as another object on display.

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Yet he retains a remarkable agency: head held high, he is seated in a comfortable pose, with a cane and hat, and wears a light-coloured suit with detailing around its cuffs that marks it as non-European. This recovery of a dissenting figure is an invitation to a contrapuntal reading, after Said (51), and amongst the pomp and ceremony of 1889, Samba Laobé Thiam's traces in history and fiction make a significant contribution to the contemporary understanding of the individual experiences of the men and women who were placed on display in Paris.

Developing the postcolonial analysis of this subaltern group, Putnam raises the question of whether it is possible for subjects to "claim agency in an environment not of their making?" (63). Four decades later, Faure-Favier's fictional reimagining does not and cannot recover lost subaltern voices, but it does ascribe remarkable agency to Samba Laobé Thiam to envisage a complex, subversive dynamic at work in 1889. While the cultural reappropriation of a historical figure is never unproblematic, Faure-Favier's decision to use details of a real-life figure for her fiction appears to support her wider ambition to emphasize the realism and potential proximity of her futuristic contrapuntal vision of race relations, and Faure-Favier repeatedly insists on Samba's agency in *Blanche et Noir*. At the Universal Exhibition, the fictionalized Samba discovers new agricultural methods and techniques – leading, readers are told, to a three-fold increase in his groundnut production that same year (Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 131)! Within the strict confines of a colonial framework, the narrative remains subversive in its conviction that a participant in the *Village sénégalais* is not a passive specimen on display, but an active, energetic, and charismatic character who seizes the opportunity to exploit French know-how to his own gain. Yet this comes with reassurance to the more conservative reader: intelligence in a colonized subject, the narrative argues, does not represent a threat to French hegemony; rather it should be recognized for its potential to enhance the glory of the French empire. At the novel's *dénouement*, the intersection of gender and race comes to the

fore as Jeanne's *oncle nègre*, François, finally appears to voice his own story.

### modernist mimic men?

Faure-Favier's novels repeatedly play with notions of time, often projecting forward into an imagined future, but also exploring the past to change perceptions of the present, and vice versa. Accordingly, in *Blanche et Noir*, primitivism, that defining trope of modernism, is displaced to a recent point in history: and so the account of Malvina's and Samba's experiences at the *Exposition universelle* becomes anachronistic through its grafting of modernist discourse onto a scene set in 1889. This is evident in Samba's first tactic of seduction: enthralling Malvina with his discussion of *l'art nègre* (Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 129). Although European interest in African art was developing in the 1880s, the concept of *l'art nègre* gained traction in the later modernist era, so Faure-Favier's novel situates Samba as a man who is several decades ahead of his time. Contemporary modernist primitivist stereotypes are thus dispensed with, via displacement to 1889, through this historic subplot which is related via reported speech. Meanwhile, in the novel's main narrative, in the mid-1920s Jeanne meets François, creating an encounter in which racial and gendered progress made since 1889 – and crucially, this is in the fictional world of the novel where 1889 appears more like the 1920s – can be measured. By grafting contemporary attitudes onto the past era of 1889, and imagining the progress that could have been made in the intervening years, the author lays out her vision of an alternative present, thereby presenting a compelling account of an egalitarian (future) direction for French society. This is achieved when Jeanne and François hold a lengthy conversation, running to four chapters, in which a white woman and a mixed-race man discuss marginalization, discrimination, and their aspirations for the future. In addition to its visionary content on race and gender relations, this conversation is also a bold structural move: granting utter predominance to a dialogue

between female and black voices is likely to be an instance of another Faure-Favier “first” in modernist literature. The sole white male intervention comes from François's mechanic, who offers dithyrambic praise of his boss (147).

In these final chapters, the text stages an encounter which can be understood as a proto-postcolonial disruption which particularly resonates with Homi K. Bhabha's later writings on the subversive potential of colonial mimicry. While the concept of mimicry has entered the mainstream of anglophone postcolonial criticism, in the French context, its reception has been limited and this section of the analysis aims to address such gaps in theoretical understanding.<sup>23</sup> In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues for the agency of colonized peoples, against the mute and passive descriptions which characterize Said's orientalism. Bhabha's theorization of mimicry provides insights into the implementation of colonial structures of domination, foregrounding their unintentional subversion to become sites of ambivalence and resistance; fascinatingly, Faure-Favier's visionary colonial text anticipates these dynamics, and further nuances them by creating a colonial framework in which gender is also a vector of analysis. For Bhabha, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” [original emphasis]; it is also “the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (122). The obsessive desire to mould the colonial subject is evident, Bhabha argues, in the “absurd extravagance of Macaulay's ‘Minute’ (1835)” in which Macaulay urges for the formation of “a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (124–25). Drawing on both Indian and Caribbean discourse around education, Bhabha's development of mimicry is directly influenced by a fundamental episode in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), when the anti-hero Singh reflects on a

Westernized memory – an apple he presented to his teacher, when in reality it must have been an orange – a memory which he realizes the dominant colonial culture has corrupted (97).

In Faure-Favier's novel, François is the embodiment of a mimic man. Raised as part of a colonial elite in Senegal, his French Republican education ensures that he exudes Frenchness and assimilation, all attributes which, as François himself is more than aware, have prepared him for a life of service to uphold the glory of his French motherland. Faure-Favier is at pains to demonstrate how such cultural affinities between different races on different continents can come about, and here, the novel also anticipates Bourdieu's later work on cultural capital (1979): while the uncle and niece are brought together by their legitimate claims over the objectified cultural capital of Malvina's ancestral home, it is their embodied cultural capital which creates an immediate sense of kinship, symbolized by a shared cultural artefact, the classic French children's tale *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (*Sophie's Misfortunes*, 1858). As François explains, in Senegal, literature provided him with a model for imagining the life of his faraway niece (Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 126). In Faure-Favier, a colonial author, there is (unsurprisingly) no postcolonial awareness that by privileging Western educational models, other local forms of knowledge will have been neglected, denigrated, or completely lost; postcolonial authors such as the acclaimed Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé have expounded at length on this aspect. For example, it is particularly striking that both Faure-Favier and Condé, whose works are separated by seven decades, fix upon the example of *Les Malheurs de Sophie* by the Comtesse de Ségur. In Condé (29), however, the book is recast as a locus of cultural domination and used to reveal the destructive socio-cultural consequences of a value system in which European knowledge is prized above any other. Providing two opposing perspectives, these women writers both demonstrate how culture may be shared across different civilizations to strengthen understanding;

yet in so doing, they also expose the value systems and hierarchies in which such cultural exchanges operate. A shift can therefore be tracked from Faure-Favier's uncritical colonial praise, to Condé's postcolonial problematization of cultural domination.

Where Bhabha and Faure-Favier most closely coincide is in their identification of the transgressive agency of mimicry, which each writer posits as central to the identity of the mimic man. In Bhabha, mimicry works to destabilize colonial hierarchical authority by drawing attention to the colonial other's undeniable humanity. The formation of mimic men – and indeed, the process of mimicry is theorized by Bhabha in terms which presuppose only male agents at either side of the equation – is a mechanism to promote Empire which in fact leads to a destabilizing of colonial power. Through their very coming-into-being, the fact of the colonized peoples' humanity becomes an undeniable truth. This calls into question the very principles of superiority underpinning the colonial endeavour: "the menace of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (Bhabha 126; original emphasis).

To what extent might the recognition of the humanity of the colonized other – François – lead to a destabilization of the hierarchies upon which colonialism, and in the French context, the *mission civilisatrice*, are predicated? Despite her unwavering adherence to French colonialism, Faure-Favier nonetheless identifies the potential of the process understood after Bhabha as mimicry to subvert dominant power structures, and her imagining of a subversive colonial proto-mimic man draws attention to blind spots in Bhabha's later formulation. *Blanche et Noir* broadens the scope of mimicry to include the recent past of the First World War as a site of colonial subversion: François has served his *mère-patrie* as a First World War hero and flying ace, a strategic detail included to convince the reader of his unassailable Frenchness. Faure-Favier perceptively identifies the significance of military service as a site of mimicry's subversive

appropriation of its own form of agency, quite unanticipated by the colonial hegemony, and an agency which reveals itself at the intersection of colonial attempts to discipline, reform, and exploit the colonial subject.

Moreover, through Faure-Favier's focus on the relationship between François and Jeanne, she moves mimicry into quite new territory, by exploring its potential for a gendered form of subversion. *Blanche et Noir* proposes, from an avowedly early feminist perspective, that the superior ability of white women to appreciate the sophistication of black culture offers nothing less than a subversive stratagem with which to challenge French white male supremacy. Indeed, Faure-Favier's colonial work identifies and harnesses the phenomenon which after Bhabha is understood as mimicry in order to advance the radical argument that two marginalized groups, white women and non-white men, might form a coalition in order to bring about a more egalitarian society for both parties.<sup>24</sup> In the final sections of the novel, the suggestion of a proto-feminist, interracial, mutual strategy of liberation becomes increasingly urgent; in turn, the nuance of the title *Blanche et Noir* shifts from the implied genre of romance, into altogether more politicized territory and the suggestion of a challenge to the established order.

Faure-Favier had a keen interest in feminism and directly engaged with the term in her writing; as early as 1910, she provided the preface for *Les féministes avant le féminisme*, a publication tracing historical antecedents of feminism. Yet despite the visionary, anti-racist tenor and white patriarchal opposition in *Blanche et Noir*, the novel's fabric still exhibits and upholds hegemonic cultural values. The most illuminating example of the novel's paradoxical revolutionary yet reactionary stance emerges when Jeanne identifies the subversive potential for black mimic men to advance (white) women's rights, only to suggest that these two groups might unite to form a coalition for mutual benefit and to promote and ensure France's successful continuing colonial expansion and rule. Here, the contradictions of Faure-Favier's narrative

reveal themselves fully: she develops a strand of feminism which is at once vehemently anti-racist, yet pro-colonial. This is exemplified when in Senegal, Malvina is figured as using her status and talent to convince those Senegalese who are not yet submissive to the French that they should cease their resistance to colonialism, and instead opt to "profiter de la civilisation que la France leur apportait" (benefit from the civilization which France was bringing to them; Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 133). While the scene remains remarkable for the autonomy and agency it accords a woman, Malvina is only permitted to exercise power as a strategy to uphold the dominant hierarchy: a hierarchy in which her place remains severely restricted. In the final lengthy conversation between the cousins, when a frustrated François decries the French for their lack of *fraternité* towards black men, Jeanne assures him it is women who hold the answer, directly referring back to the mediatory model provided by Malvina:

Les femmes reprendront, un jour, le beau rôle de médiatrice [...] Les femmes, avec leur cerveau élargi et leur cœur meilleur: voilà les véritables civilisatrices! Ce sont elles qui feront cesser ce terrible antagonisme de race [...] (142)

One day, women will once again resume their fine role as mediators [...] Women, with their larger brains and their superior hearts: it is they who are the true civilizers! It is they who will put an end to the terrible antagonism between the races [...]

Jeanne's fervent belief in women's considerable abilities is at once daring, in the way she imagines a gendered end to racism, yet deeply conservative, in her conviction that women's powers are at their zenith when they exert influence as wives to further the goals of patriarchal, colonial society. Faure-Favier herself had expressed this idea in non-fiction as early as 1902, discussing gender (but with no reference to race) in an article which invoked the "influence" argument prominent at the time, in

which she urged that, for a woman, “to give counsel is often the best means of action” (qtd in English in Offen 496–97). The “influence” argument was in wide circulation in French society of the time, and fraught with inconsistencies, born as it was of the intersection of pragmatism and privilege. It would seem that carving out greater power within existing systems appeared the only viable stratagem.

In 1906, Faure-Favier again suggests a line of female-led soft diplomacy, in an article which provocatively employs the female form of the noun President in its title “Les Présidentes de la République” – what is referred to here is not the idea of female presidents, although the original French leaves deliberate room for ambiguity, but, in what must have again come as a reassuringly reactionary move to her contemporary readership, the role of the women married to French Presidents. Faure-Favier argues that these elite wives are fundamental in the construction of the state, and demonstrate, at their best, remarkable intellectual prowess. From a similarly paradoxical position, the narrator of *Blanche et Noir* argues against racism and for a new societal role for elite women, but all the while still seeks to reassure the reader that these developments will only serve to uphold the power of the patriarchal French empire. Indeed it is, she opines, the future success of the colonial enterprise that hinges on the kind of evolutions she proposes. Faure-Favier argues problematically, if daringly and even pragmatically, for a parasitic feminism that co-exists within established patriarchal frameworks, and here again, there is a certain anticipation of the unstoppable dynamics of agency in the face of systemic oppression which anticipates, and refracts through the lens of gender, Bhabha’s mimicry. Women too, particularly those from a social elite, emerge as a kind of mimic women: educated and socialized to a restricted level deemed appropriate by the dominant hegemony, but nonetheless capable of asserting their own agency in unanticipated ways which the dominant patriarchy cannot fully control. Faure-Favier thus furnishes a blueprint for

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improving the lot of an elite minority comprising white women and black men, rather than functioning as a means to dismantle systemic oppression. Yet in so doing, *Blanche et Noir* also compellingly sets out the similarities between the oppression of women and the oppression of racism, pinpointing domination’s reliance on internalizing mechanisms of inferiority and perceived lack of agency. To counteract this, she proposes a countercultural strategy of opposition and liberation which foreshadows Spivak’s imperative to “unlearn” privilege as loss: in Faure-Favier, different elite groups recognize that the barriers of gender and race constructed to create and maintain their societies are also preventing them from accessing deeper insights, potentialities, and emancipation. Read against the prevalent racism and misogyny of her time, Faure-Favier’s articulation of a radical, more egalitarian vision is powerful, provocative, and astonishing.

In her personal life, Faure-Favier diverged from any conservative image of womanhood: she married, divorced, had her only daughter out of wedlock, eventually married the father (her long-term partner), only to divorce again. Yet at the age of 57, when *Blanche et Noir* was published, despite the personal and political events of the intervening years, Faure-Favier’s feminism, at least in her literature, remained contingent on the role of women exerting influence, rather than women’s direct powers of leadership, just as, in her anti-racism, she urged for the upholding of the colonial system. Nonetheless, Jeanne remains single throughout the narrative, with her only romantic relationship, a wartime marriage which almost instantly leaves her a war widow, granted no more than a few lines. She undertakes an upwards social trajectory, moving from the provinces to Paris where she becomes an independent professional, then sets off for Senegal at the novel’s conclusion, a departure which is, again subversively, depicted not as a voyage into the heart of darkness, but as an aspirational cultural exchange and opportunity for a new level of female emancipation. For all these contradictions, which reveal much about the conflicting dynamics of



her age, the novel's humanistic impulse remains irrepressible. When assuring François of female solidarity with the cause of black men, Jeanne declares that it is women who must lead the way in proclaiming:

que la race noire vaut la race blanche et que la beauté réside là autant qu'ici, qu'un cerveau de noir est constitué comme un cerveau de blanc et qu'il n'est qu'une humanité.

that the value of the black race is equal to that of the white race, and that beauty is to be found in the one just as often as in the other; that a black brain is exactly the same as a white brain and that there is but one humanity. (Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 142)

Will humanistic rhetoric suffice? Faure-Favier allows Jeanne one moment of self-doubt at the novel's conclusion, as she sits in the aeroplane heading for Dakar and realizes her hopes for progress may be "illusion, chimère peut-être" (illusion, perhaps no more than a dream; 152). Here too, her unswerving optimism wins out: "Qu'importe! Il n'est que de vouloir et l'idéal devient la fraternelle réalité! Fraternité des races, je vole vers vous" (Dash it all! Isn't dreaming enough to turn ideals into a fraternal reality? Racial fraternity, I am flying ever closer to you; 152).

\* \* \*

The wider question remains of how to frame *Blanche et Noir* in terms of interwar writings on race. Faure-Favier was a contemporary of the Nardal sisters, Jane and Paulette, who both published articles in *La Dépêche africaine* around the time of the journal's favourable review of Faure-Favier. The three women illustrate quite different currents of thought. The black Martinican-born Nardal sisters were producing work which, through the recent paradigm-shifting work of feminist critics and theoreticians of race, is now recognized as proto-Négritude in its pride in a black racial identity (Sharpley-Whiting). Paulette Nardal herself denounced the way that she and her sister Jane were sidelined – a fact which she

explicitly connected to gender – by the very Négritude movement which they had helped to create (Sharpley-Whiting 17). There are also unmistakable early expressions of the celebration of blackness in *Blanche et Noir*: Samba's pride in Senegalese and more particularly Wolof culture; deliberately sophisticated, plural depictions of African cultures throughout the novel; Malvina's conviction that François must always be proud of his "sang noir" (black blood; 134), and François's apparent assimilation of both Senegalese and French cultures, demonstrate Faure-Favier's considerable attempts to present her contemporary readers with a nuanced, progressive depiction of race. Jeanne's sustained exegesis of race and racial stereotypes builds a compelling seam of anti-racist thought. A racial critique of cultural appropriations of blackness is offered by François when he berates those metropolitan French who fawn over "les pitreries simiesques des jazz-bands!" (the simian buffoonery of jazz bands; 140), which he perceives as all-too-superficial encounters with black culture. Black reviews were all the rage at the time for the white Parisian public, yet their reliance on and perpetuation of a stereotypical portrayal of blackness leaves the young black man frustrated. Through François's critical stance towards such racial reductionism, Faure-Favier anticipates Césaire's caustic references in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*) to the equally superficial modernist vogue for black musical innovations such as the lindy hop. Césaire reads these trends as evidence of white cultural schizophrenia towards blackness: a neurotic vacillation between fawning admiration and hatred, both of which emotions rely on reductive racial stereotypes (103).

Yet in sharp contradistinction to black authors such as René Maran, who received the *Goncourt* prize in 1921 and subsequently lost his post as a colonial administrator for *Batouala*, his novel condemning colonial exploitation, Faure-Favier resolutely envisages progress in race and gender relations going hand in hand with the ongoing project of

French colonialism. A figure such as François, she imagines, formed by the *mission civilisatrice* and in particular by the French Republican education system, can only serve to further the glory of French colonialism. Her comments on the role of education in the formation of black colonial French subjects are particularly astute, and in this, she has a contemporary model in Blaise Diagne, who is referred to, anonymously, in the novel (Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 140). Diagne was the first black Senegalese *député* to be elected to the *Assemblée Nationale*; at once African and French, he could not please all the people all of the time.<sup>25</sup> He was vehemently criticized by one of the leading proponents of the New Negro movement, W.E.B. Du Bois, for being “a Frenchman who is accidentally black” (397). Such criticism directly anticipates Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*) on racial denial and the psychopathology of the colonized. Nonetheless, the intractable difficulties facing Diagne and other black French *députés* such as Gratien Candace (the representative for Guadeloupe) become evident from the historical record. Well into the late 1920s, Diagne and Candace were the subject of abject racist political caricatures in the French press. Dominique Chathuant has drawn attention to the depiction in 1933 of Guadeloupean *député* Candace as a tribal warrior, naked apart from rings around his feet and a grass skirt with spear in hand, and of Diagne in 1928, also naked barring skirt and rings, and with jaws wide open, revealing rows of sharp teeth, suggesting cannibalism (134, 138). Images such as these testify to the centuries of ingrained racist stereotyping still openly expressed by the culture which had supposedly nurtured and recognized these colonial men and elevated them to positions of power; moreover, they demonstrate the audacity and subversive stance of Faure-Favier’s scenes ridiculing cannibalistic stereotypes, and her determination to hold the white French adherence to such stereotypes up to ridicule. The complex character of François, and the multiple projections to which he is subject, find

wider historical resonance in Diagne and Candace, and point to the need to reconsider these figures through the subversive, anti-colonial dynamic of mimicry: although decried in their own time by racial activists for upholding the dominant order, viewed against historical developments, men such as Diagne and Candace emerge as more nuanced individuals who marked the advent of irrevocable change.

Two contrasting models for race relations, then, are emerging in the 1920s. On the one hand stands Faure-Favier’s prediction that the collusion of a male, black colonial elite with that other oppressed group, elite white women, would lessen cultural differences and lead to improved racial harmony. Despite the seismic shift it represented, this vision derived its potential from its status as a reactionary reflex which, through strategic alliances, would slightly broaden – while also reinforcing – existing class and power hierarchies. Instead, the intellectual project that would shake France, from its metropolitan centre to its colonial peripheries, focused, above all, on race and men: the political and cultural eruption of Négritude in the 1930s. Inspired by the New Negro movement in the United States (now known as the Harlem Renaissance) and earlier Black American luminaries who advocated Pan-Africanism and black nationalism such as Du Bois, Négritude argued for the cultivation of pride in black identity as a palliative to the psychological and material damage wrought by colonialism, while completely marginalizing concerns of gender and, to a lesser but significant extent, class.

Although her political vision was paradoxical, Faure-Favier advances ideas on mixed-race relationships which are significant to any understanding of race and gender in modernism. *Blanche et Noir* presents a radical alternative to Fanon, for whom (in the context of the Second World War and its aftermath) colonial relationships between white women and black men were characterized by fantasies of male domination and revenge. Fanon castigates the “quest for white flesh” (59), a charge he levels at both genders, and behaviour he identifies as prevalent amongst black French colonized subjects, marshalling René Maran’s own novel of

mimicry, *Un Homme pareil aux autres (A Man Like Any Other, 1947)*, as supporting evidence of the racial disavowal which characterizes Maran's anti-hero, an assimilated black man, as he undertakes a torturous pursuit of a white woman. Faure-Favier takes quite the opposite line of thought. She conceived mixed-race relationships between black men and white women as an expression of female agency and as evidence of the superior sensibilities and perceptiveness of white women, able as they are to recognize the sophistication of black peoples and their cultures and thereby extend their allegiances to another group oppressed by white male supremacy, to mutual advantage. Faure-Favier grants this female perspicacity nothing less than the power to bring about a radical cultural shift. Once white and black people become related through mixed-race relationships, she posits, family kinship bonds – an area in which, traditionally, women exert demonstrable power, as demonstrated by Malvina, and then Jeanne – will begin to counteract and reverse French societal race prejudices. It is perhaps in this respect that her novel emerges as truly visionary. *Blanche et Noir* closes with the surprise revelation of another black/white pairing through François's children, a little boy with light skin, named Samba, and a dark-skinned girl named Malvina. History has repeated itself, but with a provocative twist as the racial signifier Samba is (literally) deconstructed, while Malvina's legacy lives on in a child with "bronze" skin (Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 142). This future may be (y)ours, Faure-Favier implies to her reader, in a bold twist evidently designed to shock her interwar contemporaries and force greater contemplation of the extent of their own humanist, Republican, democratic ideals.

### en guise de conclusion

Wherever Faure-Favier's activities are positioned – be it mapping her work in the modernist middlebrow, or as an aviation journalist hurtling through the clouds at record-breaking speeds – her rediscovery grants access to a unique perspective on race and gender in modernism, which is by turns subversive,

reactionary, and transgressive. Her conviction that aviation held the potential for an elite group of white women and black men to find mutual emancipation through new alliances would be all but destroyed by the advent of the Second World War and its transformation of the aeroplane into a weapon of devastation on a hitherto unimagined scale; indeed, Faure-Favier's alternative vision is rendered all the more poignant and significant for this. Although when advancing startlingly innovative, pioneering ideas about gender and race, Faure-Favier remains constrained by the dominant ideologies which were her lived reality – a patriarchal, classist society, the *mission civilisatrice* and wider French colonialism – the stance adopted in *Blanche et Noir*, humanist yet reactionary, illuminates her singular response to the paradoxes and contradictions of her position and her era. The novel's extraordinary vision in identifying that a proto-mimic man such as François held considerable subversive potential and the power to challenge the existing world order proved to be both radical and prescient: Jeanne, too, demonstrates her own patterns of internal colonization, a gendered form of mimicry, punctuated by increasing bursts of subversive agency. Yet change, when it came, would largely bypass the political movements towards (the limited, elite) gender and racial equality for which Faure-Favier argued. Instead, mimicry's subversive dynamic gained unstoppable momentum through the rise of African figures who in no small measure resembled François Laobé-Rieux; male politicians such as Diagne, who, despite the intractable contradictions of their own positions, caught between France and Africa, colonial power and colonized reality, marked the threshold of the impending revolutionary decolonization movements which followed the Second World War.



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## notes

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1 Unusually, and in a break with standard French convention, Faure-Favier’s title capitalizes both nouns and in so doing makes a bold statement of equality between both parties.

2 The novel has never been translated. All translations here and elsewhere are my own, unless otherwise stated.

3 For detailed discussion of the term’s development in French, see Hardwick 33–39.

4 Bergson presented a series of influential lectures at the Sorbonne in the winter of 1911 (Gillies 62–63).

5 So influential were Faure-Favier’s guides that to this day, they are held in locations such as the McDermott Library of the US Air Force Academy. See [www.worldcat.org/title/guide-des-voyages-aeriens-paris-lausanne/oclc/20011500](http://www.worldcat.org/title/guide-des-voyages-aeriens-paris-lausanne/oclc/20011500). Accessed 28 Oct. 2020.

6 For an overview of women’s roles in French colonialism, see Knibiehler and Goutalier; there were also a number of French female missionaries working in sub-Saharan Africa (see Boittin 185).

7 As far as I can establish, I am the first scholar to draw attention to these connections with Rachilde and Cendrars. I have identified an article published in *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* which is an account of Faure-Favier paying a (literal) flying visit to Rachilde (Faure-Favier, “Une Visite aérienne”). I have also identified a book dedicated by Cendrars to Faure-Favier in 1919, evidently his collection *Dix-Neuf poèmes élastiques* released that same year, and a letter he sent to her three decades later in 1950.

8 The first known short story in French to focus on a relationship between a white woman and a black man is by the neglected abolitionist woman writer, Sophie Doin (1826).

9 Although *Le Figaro* claims Faure-Favier’s article appeared in *Renaissance des Arts*, it appears likely

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that the review was actually *La Renaissance de l’art français et des industries de luxe*, a title edited by Henry Lapauze: [catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32850781t](http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32850781t). Accessed 9 June 2022.

10 The drive to recover lost female authors of the 1920s is a work-in-progress across the wider European cultural sphere. In Spain, for example, a number of initiatives seek to restore the memory of the group of female thinkers and artists known as the “Generation of 1927” and also called *Las Sinsombrero* [the hat-less women] (Balló et al.; Balló). In the German context, the 1920s novels of Irmgard Keun are also attracting new critical attention.

11 More broadly, Little has drawn attention to the persistent omission of references to Faure-Favier across a range of standard French and English reference works (“*Blanche et Noir*” 216); see also Little’s *Between Totem and Taboo*, a study of couples comprising black men and white women in French literature (tracing this theme from the 1700s to the contemporary era), which includes important discussion of Faure-Favier while continuing to draw attention to her absence in literary and cultural histories (104).

12 The death of Jeanne’s mother in the Influenza pandemic of 1918 is also deftly handled in the same chapter (Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 111), a fleeting textual engagement with a global pandemic which takes on new resonance during the COVID-19 pandemic (ongoing at the time of writing this article). For a detailed study of literary representations of the 1918 pandemic, see Outka.

13 During archival research, Boittin located a clipping of Revon’s review in *L’Ami du peuple*, for which she provides the reference: “BMD, DOS FAU, Maxime Revon, ‘*Courrier des Lettres – Blanche et Noir*,’ *L’Ami du Peuple*, n.d.” (Boittin 244). Boittin omits to include BMD in her list of abbreviations, but it certainly refers to the Parisian feminist library *Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand* where the librarians kindly confirmed the existence of a small dossier on Faure-Favier. Regrettably, the extensive BnF Retronews digital archive only includes issues of *L’Ami du peuple* from November 1928 – it appears likely that Revon’s review appeared just prior to that in October 1928, as in that month other reviews of *Blanche et Noir* were published in the French press (see, for example, Charasson).

14 See [www.retronews.fr/titre-de-presse/ami-du-peuple-ed-du-soir](http://www.retronews.fr/titre-de-presse/ami-du-peuple-ed-du-soir). Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

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15 This exclusive focus on male authors and cultural figures is also evident in an earlier article by Wohl which includes a fleeting footnote naming, but not analysing, *Les Chevaliers de l'air* to support the article's sole reference to French women authors having also produced cultural representations of aviation ("Par la voie" 49–50).

16 The name refers to a corps of colonial infantry in the French Army; *tirailleur* can be translated as sharpshooter, rifleman, or skirmisher.

17 Future archival research is required to establish to what degree Faure-Favier may have been influenced by Cousturier.

18 Written in German but set in France, Goll's novel triggered a rapid French translation in 1928 as *Le Nègre Jupiter enlève Europe*.

19 A playwright who failed to live up to his initial promise, de La Harpe was a prolific author, producing (unsuccessful) dramas and also, as is the case here, canonical works for school pupils.

20 Indeed, despite the marked absence of Faure-Favier in European reference works, discussed above, this aspect of her novel led to her inclusion in a brief section of the major 1941 survey by American-Jamaican author and historian Joel Augustus Rogers, *Sex and Race: Negro-Caucasian Mixing in All Ages and All Lands: Volume I: The Old World* (261).

21 Reported speech first identified by Palermo (291); little subsequently identifies its significance for Faure-Favier.

22 Image 1: [gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7702326g.r=Samba%20Laweb%C3%A9%20Thiam?rk=64378;0](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7702326g.r=Samba%20Laweb%C3%A9%20Thiam?rk=64378;0). Accessed 12 Nov. 2020.

Image 2: [gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7702326g/f2.item.r=Samba%20Laweb%C3%A9%20Thiam](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7702326g/f2.item.r=Samba%20Laweb%C3%A9%20Thiam). Accessed 23 Nov. 2020.

23 See, for example, Apter's theoretical analysis of "French resistance to postcolonial studies" (169); James E. Genova's historical study of French colonial Africa understood through postcolonial theory and Claire Joubert's analysis of Bhabha, which includes important discussion of the (eventual) 2007 French translation of *The Location of Culture*.

24 Faure-Favier's novel problematically sidelines black women, a marginalization which anticipates

much of later Western feminism. Nonetheless, the author displays an openness and perspicacity unusual for her time – and often lacking in later feminist writings – when she includes a brief reference in praise of the skills and beauty of the Wolof women who were part of the Senegalese Village for the 1889 exhibition (Faure-Favier, *Blanche et Noir* 130). Material circumstances are also relevant here: while Faure-Favier herself explained that her novel was in part inspired by friends in Paris who were in mixed-race relationships (Little, "Introduction: Une autofiction bicolor" xxviii), it is implied that the black colonial elite with whom she had contact involved only men.

25 For a recent study of Diagne, see Iba Der Thiam.

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