

ESSAY

An Education: Race, Class and the Rhizomorphic Bildungsroman in Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*

Kevin Cryderman

University of Victoria, CA
kevin.cryderman@gmail.com

This article examines Erna Brodber's 1980 Jamaican experimental novel *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*. In contrast to readings that emphasize the protagonist Nellie Richmond's journey from psychological fragmentation to wholeness, the essay argues that there is instead a dispersal of Nellie's identity where no psychic wholeness of the self or the collective happens. Here, Brodber employs a non-linear and polyvocal version of the Bildungsroman genre—a coming of age tale of growth and development from childhood to adulthood. The article explores this literary genre in relation to various regulative frameworks, which recast 'contexts' as the perpetual social production, conditioning, transformation and regulation of identity, spectatorship, subjectivity, psychology and behavior. In its exploration of Nellie's life history within these regulative frameworks, Brodber's unusual rhizomorphic (or rhizomatic) version of the Bildungsroman exists at the intersection of postcolonial and postmodern narrative forms and critically reworks the category of 'progress,' both personal and cultural-historical. More specifically, Nellie's informal education about her tangled family and community history as well as various formal educational situations in Jamaica and the United States amplify tensions between race and class that help her to denaturalize and critique both. Indeed, she navigates her ambivalent relationship to those terms in relation to both Afro-Caribbean and Euro-American culture. This critique makes her character both idiosyncratic and representational, illustrating that identity, both individual and collective, is fragmented rather than unified.

Keywords: Erna Brodber; race; class; rhizomatic; postcolonial; Bildungsroman; narrative; Caribbean literature; postmodern

Confronting the colonial ghosts in early post-independence Jamaica, Erna Brodber's first novel *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980) narrates elements such as the childhood, education, sexual awakening, activism, mental breakdown and healing of its female "khaki" (i.e. light-skinned mixed-race Afro-Jamaican) protagonist Nellie Richmond. The experimental novel was originally conceived of as a fictional case study of the dissociative personality for Brodber's students learning about human development and abnormal psychology. While previous scholars have read the novel as a story of mental breakdown that fragments Nellie and a healing that brings her into wholeness, supposedly reflected in the nature of the text, my own take on *Jane and Louisa* is that the protagonist's subjectivity remains fragmented throughout the narrative in a way that resists linear notions of progress, and this is the key to understanding her relationality to her family, community, personal history, ancestry, and education (both informal and formal). To interrogate received conceptions of 'progress,' Nellie opens up for inspection various conceptions of racial 'lightening,' solidarity and social mobility as well as formulations of class-consciousness. In particular, Nellie's informal education about her tangled family and community history and various formal educational situations in Jamaica and the United States amplify schismatic tensions between race and class that help her to denaturalize and critique both. Ultimately, by creating a non-linear and non-hierarchical network of timespaces and multiple voices, Brodber's 'rhizomorphic' version of the Bildungsroman relates to both race and class because it calls into question wholeness, hierarchical conceptions of power and linear notions of progress that are embed-

ded within colonial paradigms. However, this dynamic creates a deep push-pull of ambivalence in her rather than simply turning colonial, race and class relations on their head and promoting black culture and racial 'uplift' in a wholesale fashion. This is important for both Nellie and Afro-Caribbean subjects more broadly because it allows them to participate more fully in—but also in a more critical fashion—both their own Afro-Caribbean culture and history and, at the same time, Euro-American society.

I. Brodber's 'Rhizomorphic' Version of the Bildungsroman

Many scholars foreground Nellie's mental health arc and its relationship to the structure of the narrative. Caroline A. Brown calls *Jane and Louisa* "hallucinogenic" and describes it as an, "experimental prose/poem mapping its heroine's descent into the looking glass world of her psychosis" (226). Kelly Baker Josephs says that the novel "seeks to speak from the inside, rather than to merely represent from a distance, the madness of a dissociated Jamaican woman" (119). Evelyn O'Callaghan's "Interior Schisms Dramatised" observes that Nellie "suffers a physical and mental breakdown, a fragmentation of self out of which she is beginning to emerge whole as the novel ends" (89). Likewise, Joyce Johnson's "Fiction and the Interpretation of History" also tends to read the novel's fragmentary polyphony as a process of psychological dissociation where the healing process moves towards reintegration and coherence. Hence, Johnson resolves the four main sections of Brodber's novel to a modified linear pattern of psychological development within its non-linear form.¹ In "English is a Foreign Anguish," Gay Wilentz remarks that "Nellie's movement towards psychic wholeness is also one towards a less disruptive, more holistic language" (272).

In contrast, I concede that Nellie has mental health issues and that healing does occur, partially involving a connection to her community and ancestors, but instead of emphasizing psychological integration and wholeness within a linear progression, I argue that the novel foregrounds both the self-regulation and non-linear dispersal of Nellie's identity across a range of cultural-historical scales where no "psychic wholeness" (Wilentz 272) of the self or the collective is possible and that is a positive phenomenon. *Jane and Louisa* is not often discussed as a Bildungsroman, although Kaisa Ilmonen mentions it briefly in "Talking Back to the Bildungsroman: Caribbean Literature and the Dis/location of the Genre,"² yet that seems to be a literary genre it fits into, albeit in an unusual manner. Ilmonen helpfully notes that "the genre of the bildungsroman is closely connected to the tradition of the modern, its plot line highlighting the developing 'I' emancipating itself as a true subject of humanist freedom," "the manifestation of an individualistic, modern self" that occurs in Enlightenment individualism (63). Likewise, Ilmonen contrasts the traditional European Bildungsroman with the postcolonial one:

In the European version, the protagonist chooses, accepts and discards viewpoints or values on his way to a harmonious self. In portraying postcolonial reality, this becoming is not always directed towards harmonious closure, but instead towards fragmentation and friction between the self's different axes of identity. (72)

Along these same lines as Ilmonen as well as the oft-discussed notion of the fragmented subject found in post-structuralist and postmodern critical theory (e.g. Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler), in my argument here Nellie's fragmented self is embodied in Brodber's use of what I will call *Jane and Louisa's* 'rhizomorphic' Bildungsroman, which reworks the classic theme of maturation.

It is tempting to frame the novel's narrative as an arc from textual fragmentation and mental instability leading to a more orderly style and psychic wholeness by the end, where "the highly elliptical style of

¹ Johnson describes the narrative arc of Nellie's character in terms of the plot's chronology and the novel's four main sections: "The first conveys the heroine's fragmentary memories of childhood, early adulthood and education, and her separation from her original village environment. Part Two shows her undergoing and recovering from a mental breakdown that symbolizes the traumatic experiences of reconnecting with her past. Having passed through this phase successfully, she is shown in Part Three revisiting and re-interpreting the village environment. The final section reiterates the main themes by "embroidering" key motifs in the narrative. [...] The highly elliptical style of the first part gives way to more coherent forms of narrative as Nellie, the central character, discovers links between her past and her present" (81).

² "In many of the Caribbean feminist bildungsromans, the stories of mothers, grandmothers and foremothers are a form of feminist history that acknowledges women's cultural double consciousness between patriarchal language and feminist voice, as in Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*. The work becomes a folkloric entity, incorporating Jamaican oral tradition, ritual-ity, music, and spirituality in its narration. The quest for the voice of the grandmother becomes an integral part of the development of the protagonist" (Ilmonen 68).

the first part gives way to more coherent forms of narrative as Nellie, the central character, discovers links between her past and her present" (Johnson 81). In contrast, I would argue that many parts of the text along the way find links between her present and her past, starting right with the first section of the novel, entitled, "MY DEAR WILL YOU ALLOW ME." Likewise, Brown argues that "Nellie's madness" is "refracted in the chaos of Brodber's literary text" (242). However, due to the non-linear and rhizomorphic quality of the novel, it is difficult to line up Nellie's mental state with any particular characteristic of the text at any given time in her life. In fact, the most orderly section of the text is when she is having her mental breakdown during the section "TO WALTZ WITH YOU" and the most elliptical, impressionistic and fragmentary parts are often tales from her childhood. In the novel's kaleidoscopic style, her subjectivity seems to be fragmented at every age.

Indeed, the novel engages in a very specific cultural-historical exploration of an arguably more universal condition of the subject as inherently fragmented. As with all subjects, Nellie remains as an idiosyncratic and shattered locus of navigation within narrative webs, looking into a "spying glass" that will "change in colour and in shape, but never change its locus" (Brodber 76). Her relationship to her family and community is a kind of regulative framework where Nellie's relationship to both white and black cultures in Jamaica and the United States remains ambivalent. This ambivalence is a way to both see and be seen as a spectator and self-spectator, the latter involving viewing oneself by perceiving or imagining how others see you.³ For instance, while in the United States, Nellie in the first-person narration says "Watch the scene," and sometimes refers to herself in the second person "you" in the novel, or even third person "she," such as in this "scene," where she says "Shrouded, yet overt justification for her isolation. You see't. She is walking home from classes, free at last," then shifting back to first person to say "I am in a foreign country" (Brodber 27). As an alternative to and reworking of the word 'context' and its intellectual baggage as the background, setting, milieu or climate for objects of study, the term 'regulative framework' (used by people such as Judith Butler) recasts context as the perpetual social production, conditioning, transformation and regulation of identity, spectatorship, subjectivity, psychology and behavior.

A novel's narrative form is also a kind of regulative framework, including Brodber's version of the Bildungsroman in *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*. Traditionally, a Bildungsroman is a literary genre that involves a coming-of-age tale of linear growth, education and development from the immaturity of youth to the maturity of adulthood, such as *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749) by Henry Fielding, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte, *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Great Expectations* (1861) by Charles Dickens, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) by James Joyce. In form, the classic Bildungsroman is usually relatively easily digestible as a linear progression with the theme of psychological and moral maturation over time helped by various figures and influences along the way. Brodber reworks the classic genre to her own ends. Relevant here is how Michael Niblett relates Édouard Glissant's take on so-called, "emerging national literatures," which

confront a series of literary and cultural forms—both imported genres and indigenous styles—all at the same time. They must articulate and affirm the community while simultaneously critiquing the imposed models through which this has been done elsewhere; they must deform and reconstruct traditional styles in order to be able to express the contemporary situation. (6)

At the same time, Brodber's novel also fits well into Geta LeSeur's idea of the "Black Bildungsroman" in that it adapts the largely European-originated genre of the Bildungsroman to fit with black experiences of gender, race, colonialism, class, and oppression in the journey to adulthood, and it likewise shows how the protagonist's maturation and upbringing might be different from her white counterparts.

However, Brodber's novel specifically explores the Bildungsroman genre in relation to the complex and asymmetrical web of Nellie's tangled family and community history and the intermixture of race and class, and the structure of the narrative is not generally typical of the classic Euro-American or Black Bildungsroman. That being said, Ilmonen remarks in passing that in "American (and Caribbean) black literature ... the themes of collective re-remembering and reminiscing particularly construct a fragmentary and nonlinear framework for the novel," but it is difficult to assess overall general trends for the Bildungsroman genre (65). That is beyond the scope of my investigation here. In any case, the *degree* of fragmentation and

³ Charles Horton Cooley terms the phrase "looking glass self" in 1902, which roughly resonates with this concept of self-spectatorship. (See, for example, Cooley 183–184).

non-linearity might not be commonly as much as *Jane and Louisa*, though, especially in the, “MY DEAR WILL YOU ALLOW ME” section. In any case, many of the themes and motifs of Brodber’s novel are also specific to Afro-Caribbean culture (such as the kumbla: see Davies and Fido, 1990) or even Brodber herself, such as the use of the “Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home” song, dance, and “folk children’s ring game” (Brodber 52) to section off the novel and, more importantly, her own unique version of the kumbla idea (see, for example, Brodber 123 for her polymorphous description). Kelly Baker Josephs notes that

there seems to be as many definitions for Brodber’s kumbla as there are writings that try to define it ... Brodber—and her critics—offer so many different metaphor and analogies because the kumbla is different for each person. To be effective, it must resist any form of pinning down ... Although they cover a wide range of objects, one constant is that they are all enclosures offering some protection from the outside. (122–123)

In terms of narrative structure, Daryl Cumber Dance finds a resonance with the African-American Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* (1980), where the “two novelists categorically reject any linear development. Time is fluid in both works. Their novels are complex, convoluted structures, making use of constant switchings of time, place, and narrative voices with subtle and easily missed transitions” (181).

What is important here to understand my reading of Brodber’s unusual version of the Bildungsroman is the concept of the ‘rhizome’ in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), which I am applying to my narrative analysis of Brodber’s novel. Matt Bluemink explains their philosophical metaphor of the rhizome, which is borrowed from botany:

The idea of the rhizome is a structural metaphor taken from biological field of botany. It describes an underground mass of continuously growing horizontal stems or roots which extend lateral shoots at certain intervals in order to grow and establish connections with other shoots. There is no hierarchical structure to the growth of the rhizome. It doesn’t function in the same way as an aborescent ‘genealogy tree’ for example, where each point can only be connected along a strict, one directional, vertical line.

Bluemink also remarks that the rhizome always has multiple entryways, which is highly resonant with Brodber’s text, where readers could almost enter at any point since it does not build chronologically. A rhizome is also “not limited to a certain space; it is constantly growing, adapting, forming new connections with a variety of different multiplicities” (Bluemink): a characterization that seems to describe *Jane and Louisa* in terms of both narrative structure and Nellie’s exploration of relationality to friends, family, community members, and ancestors. In nature, rhizomes are decentralized and in nature one can see them in things like the mycelial network, while in the realm of technology Bluemink argues that the World Wide Web is “inherently non-linear” and an example of a modern-day rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari note that, “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. ... There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines” (7–8), which resonate with both Bluemink’s description of the World Wide Web and *Jane and Louisa*.⁴

Note that I am using the concept of the rhizome for narrative analysis, rather than in the anthropological sense. Such literary analysis can be found in works such as: *A Literary Anthropology of Migration and Belonging: Roots, Routes and Rhizomes* (2020), a collection edited by Cicilie Fagerlid and Michelle A. Tisdell. However, my reading is more in line with research done by Jasmina Sermijn, Patrick Devlieger and Gerrit Loots’ in, “The Narrative Construction of the Self: Selfhood as a Rhizomatic Story,” which finds several characteristics that are “typical” of postmodern stories, which include, “no synthesis of heterogeneity (the story elements are not synthesized around a plot),” as well as

- No hierarchy but rather narrative laterality (a story is a compilation of horizontal story elements)
- Acceptance of the “monster” (of the entirety of elements that do not fit in a traditional story structure)

⁴ Note that Deleuze and Guattari analyze cinema: “Like a rhizome, Deleuze analyses the narrative structure of cinematic medium as a ‘center-less’ system where the communication is not hierarchical and where many different signs in their heterogeneity are able to communicate” (Duarte), so that may be relevant here but is beyond the scope of this investigation.

- Monstrous time (nonlinearly organized time; e.g., story elements that are difficult to date or that conflict with the separation among past–present–future)
- Monstrous causality (a lack of clear, linear cause and effect relationships)
- Monstrous space (space that is constantly in motion and that lacks a fixed central point) (635)

(Sermijn et al.) contrast this conception of narrative with the traditional one, where “the narrative self of a person can be seen as a traditional story which, although it is temporally variable, is characterized by the presence of a plot that turns the story (and the self) into a linear, structured whole” (634). As I do, they relate the postmodern version of narrative structure to, “the postmodern idea that the self has no stable core but is multiple, multivoiced, discontinuous, and fragmented” (636). Resonant with *Jane and Louisa*, they remark that, “just like the motif of a patchwork quilt, a postmodern story is characterized not by an embroidered, continuous pattern but by the juxtaposition of more or less disjunctive elements” (635). One can therefore see Brodber’s novel as a somewhat postmodern approach to postcolonialism, and it shows links between the two.

That being said, I use the term “rhizomorphic” rather than “rhizomatic” here to play upon “morph,” which in the context of film production involves transforming one image seamlessly into another: something resonant with Brodber’s novel. Here I want to emphasize both the rhizome and the concept of transformation. In a slightly different manner in *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy also employs the term “rhizomorphic.” However, he equates it with “fractal”: a “rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation I call the black Atlantic” (4), a “pattern of movement, transformation, and relocation” (xi). In contrast, I would make a distinction between the rhizomorphic and the fractal. I define the term ‘fractal’ as iteration and recursion in the sense of the Mandelbrot set: a never-ending pattern that repeats itself at different scales.⁵ Picking up on the word “fractal” used in *Nothing’s Mat*, Patricia Noxolo seems to employ the term in this way in her discussion of Brodber’s 2014 novel, which I cover at the end of this section of the essay. According to my own understanding, I would say that fractals are symmetrical while rhizomes are asymmetrical, the difference between the network of lines and fragments found in *Jane and Louisa* and fractal patterns of circles found in *Nothing’s Mat* in Brodber’s 2014 novel.

In any case, while Brodber’s *Jane and Louisa* is literally static, it mimics rhizomorphic movement. Nellie’s subjectivity forms in this way as it interchanges within such regulative frameworks as she experiences her life and memories and undergoes various forms of education. Instead of a linear progression from childhood to adulthood built around any kind of centralized point, the narrative form of Brodber’s novel is a fragmented and non-linear tangled network of relationships that involve her personal, familial and community histories. While in the process of narrative transformation and with many nodes and linking-up shoots, Bildungsroman development and maturation in *Jane and Louisa* take the form of increased connections to family, community and her own mind in a rhizomorphic manner rather than a linear and arborescent accumulation of experiences leading clearly from childhood to adulthood. Like a rhizome, with *Jane and Louisa* there is heterogeneity, multiplicity, and cartography rather than linear progression.

It should be noted here that despite the fragmented, rhizomorphic and polyvocal nature of the narrative structure, Brodber’s novel still has some of the hallmarks of a classic Bildungsroman to some degree in that it explores a protagonist’s trials and obstacles in the movement from youth to maturity. *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* also somewhat resonates with the classic thematic development of a Bildungsroman novel: “A Bildungsroman typically begins with a protagonist who feels alienated and alone, but ends on a positive note with the character finding a sense of belonging or self-realization, though many authors have played with this formula” (LitCharts). Meanwhile, during Nellie’s development there is a move away from a secluded rural setting in Jamaica, where “it is difficult to find us” and “outside infiltrated our nest only as its weave allowed” (Brodber 9–10). After Nellie hits puberty and gets “it,” her first menstruation and beginnings of female sexuality, she travels from her childhood’s secluded rural village, the “mossy covert, dim and cool and very dark” place to an (unnamed) larger town to live with, “Aunt Becca and the sun” (9, 122). As she gets older, Nellie then lives in the urban setting of “government houses” (49) in “the City” (which is likely Kingston, although it is never explicitly named) (42) and an urban setting in a school in Philadelphia, USA for her doctorate, which may be in medicine or social work.

⁵ Arguably, I would contend that Gilroy does not mean “fractal” in this sense, but more in line with the rhizomatic of Deleuze and Guattari, whom Gilroy briefly cites in *The Black Atlantic*. Note that Brodber is writing before Deleuze and Guattari first published their concept of the rhizome (1980 and 1987).

Jane and Louisa is non-linear and fragmented as a Bildungsroman. The “MY DEAR WILL YOU ALLOW ME” section wildly jumps around in time and voice a lot in an elliptical, polyvocal, constantly transforming and puzzling manner with a narrative structure that might be called ‘kaleidoscopic,’ with an array of textual “spinning mass of crystals” (Brodbner 38), crashing into each other and constantly forming new, differently-colored, unusual and beautiful patterns. Much of the “TO WALTZ WITH YOU” section that covers her activism, death of Robin, re-meeting of Baba Ruddock, and “six weeks of convalescence” for her mental breakdown is unexpectedly chronological and straight forward, albeit somewhat fluid and impressionistic at times, with the exception of chapter nine and ten. In chapter nine there is an indented fragmented and amorphous narrative that might be described as hallucinogenic about Nellie letting herself into a “new world” and looking into a metaphorical “kaleidoscope” and a connecting line in the textual rhizome to “The Moving Camera” section much later in the novel in that it mentions Alice telling Nellie about Tia Maria and Madame Faith (75–76). In “TO WALTZ WITH YOU”, chapter nine’s indented narrative, Nellie is talking and traveling with her Great-Aunt Alice (who may be alive or a spirit at the time). Also resonating with the much later “Moving Camera” section, part ten of “TO WALTZ WITH YOU” has a fragmented trope and structure of a polyphonic musical dream-like text, where Nellie is imaginatively communing with the spirits of people she knows (or knows of) with the help of Alice at the “watering hole” where “My kinsmen came out of the rocks, tall, proud and happy to meet me” (78–81). Alice tells her to imagine herself as a, “passage, a clean rubber tube,” and Nellie closes her eyes and finds herself, “floating evenly, deeply, falling through layers of atmosphere, cool and mossy, no cobwebs” (78). Nellie then sees and hears a “choir” of sorts, a magical instance of “art from any angle ... music, shape, production, performance, colour scheme, blending of colours, a pageant,” that is a kind of “conductor-less orchestra” (79).

For the “INTO THIS BEAUTIFUL GARDEN” section, the only explicit marker of age is when Nellie says, “I am Nellie and I am eight” (Brodbner 86) and “we were all eight” (94), but it may take place at various ages in her young life. It moves from stories about her family and people in the “whole community” (86), that Granny Tucker prays for, and their relationship to each other in a somewhat fragmented manner when Nellie was young. There are also some of the mysteries surrounding Nellie’s Aunt Becca, Nellie’s “father’s eldest sister” who is “fair of face” and a “lady who feels shame” and does so to others with her “shaming eye” (92). Becca is “all cleanliness and decency” (93). There is a dance and tales of people from her family and community that Nellie describes in a somewhat fluid, jumbled and impressionistic manner that shows a tangled web of relationships, connections and histories with the insertion of several songs. At the end of the section, after some discussion of Baba as a “big people’s boy” (111), the text jumps to Baba Harris Ruddock preaching at a church, telling a religious parable about a, “boat that had overturned at sea” (115), for instance, which seems to be when he and Nellie are adults (115–116). Their ages are uncertain there.

The “JANE AND LOUISA WILL SOON COME HOME” section once again jumps around in voice and time, including explicitly noted ages such as eleven (Brodbner 119) and twenty-five (131). Here, there are many unclear points in Nellie’s life. The narrative is ‘shown’ by the “lantern slide” (132) of Aunt Alice (which may or may not be a literal slide show with Alice alive or as a spirit) seemingly after Nellie’s mental breakdown, where “the scratches on your rear have healed” (133). Recall that Nellie vigorously “walked and scratched in [her] circle” (66) when she was having her breakdown, which is also a metaphoric form of rebirth when she recovers since Baba says to her, “Your dermis is beginning to show and it is beautiful” (72). The section also has tales of Nellie’s ancestors such as Rebecca Pinnock’s (nee Richmond’s) life before Nellie was born, such as when she, “threw away Mass Tanny’s child and made herself a mule” (133) as well as a way back to William Whiting and Tia Maria, Nellie’s great-grandfather and great-grandmother, whom Nellie may or may not have known in real life as a child (30). Granted, this section of the novel is far less fragmented than “MY DEAR WILL YOU ALLOW ME,” but the non-linearity and the sudden insertion of the enigmatic and puzzling description of the polymorphous kumbla idea and the Afro-Caribbean folk tale of Anancy and Dryhead (where the narrator is unclear in both instances) adds to the somewhat fragmented and polyvocal nature of the section. Even within the Anancy folk tale, the language shifts from more standard English to moments of creole patois, such as, “Pressure dey pon mi bad man” (127). The novel seems to end with Nellie’s current age, which is unclear, and at the very end of the novel she then has an enigmatic dream of trying to give birth to a “large sized parrot fish,” with a remark that “It will come” and “We are getting ready” (147). For exactly what is not certain, but perhaps it is a form of rebirth for the Jamaican nation, such as when Nellie quotes a song near the start of the novel that says, “We are out to build a new Jamaica” (9).

Thus, the progression of the novel is non-linear, elliptical and fragmented in form, which involves the ways in which Brodbner reimagines the Bildungsroman genre to demonstrate how the subject here, Nellie, operates in a web of interconnections within her family history, community and a rhizomorphic network of

memories constantly in flux. Some points in the text illustrate what Brodber is doing with the Bildungsroman genre. For instance, in its opening pages, the text involves Nellie telling Granny Tucker that she is getting a “scholarship” (Brodber 8). The level of school is not explicitly noted, but it is possibly college (perhaps abroad) or the “parish scholarship” from Nellie’s childhood that she discusses with Aunt Becca (92). Thus, we do not know for sure the age Nellie is during this conversation. The text then moves to Nellie playing, “dolly house in our sink hole searching for treasures which the sea washed up” as a child (9) and then suddenly to “the death of Aunt Becca” (14), who is very much alive in other parts of the novel, such as two pages later when Nellie asks permission from Aunt Becca to go out on a movie date to see *Jack the Ripper* (which is likely the 1959 film) with Harris ‘Baba’ Ruddock when she is sixteen and living with Becca (16). The text then quickly moves to her supposed shift into madness where she feels like she is being “buried alive” after the death of her boyfriend Robin in her thirties, where, “My man has died, but I am falling ... They will say you are mad and cannot hold a man” (19–20). Nellie is a “foreign student” (27) in “Sam’s country” (a.k.a. Uncle Sam, in Philadelphia) for her doctorate degree, then just a little while later in the text (32) she finds she is “not home,” and returns back to, “I am six and little for my age” just a few pages later (35). After tales from her adulthood, such as her job as a social worker with a “social working smile” (44), where her age and the chronology is not clear, the text then jumps back to, “I am Nellie and I am eight” (86) later in the book when she is eleven and “soon something strange will happen to you,” which, again, seems to be her first period and foray into female sexuality: “it” (119). The chronology then moves forward to what seems like the age of twenty-five a short while later in the narrative, although Nellie might be dating the beginning of her kumbla as some time in her childhood other than birth: “Consider the bind for my tender flesh and eyes after nearly a quarter of a century in my kumbla” (131).

As part of *Jane and Louisa’s* fragmented and non-linear narrative, the novel’s relating of Nellie, her family and her community is also interspersed with inserted storytelling from people like her father (Brodber 36–38) or Alice, who functions as a kind of spirit guide for her (39). Again, interspersed into the text to increase fragmentation, there are also Afro-Caribbean folk tales such as those of the trickster figure Anancy and Dryhead, the, “king of the water” (124). Anancy pretends that he is going to give Dryhead all of his children in repayment for getting caught fishing, “poaching on another man’s property” (124), in his waters—“Take them, eat them, work them, anything” (126). Anancy gets away by disguising the same son, Tucuma, to look like multiple children (“go eena kumbla,” e.g. 128) and takes Tucuma home with him in the end as the last child to be spared in a boat he borrowed from Dryhead, escaping in the end. Indeed, Anancy is a “born liar, a spinner of fine white cocoons, a protector of his children” (130).

Meanwhile, the family connections and relationships are often a mystery that unfolds in the text as part of Brodber’s version of the Bildungsroman. For instance,

We knew that Mass Tanny and Mass Stanley were related but didn’t know how. We knew that Mass Tanny had done something to Uncle Lester but Aunt Becca was to marry him! What is this now?
 – So why is she going to Mass Mehiah’s church to pray for him?
 – Guilty. She is guilty and you are all family-
 – We related to Mass Tanny and Mass Stanley? – (Brodber 95–97)

Nellie describes her tangled family and community history as a “jigsaw puzzle” waiting to be solved: “Any scrap of news about Aunt Becca and Mass Tanny, Mass Stanley and how and why they were related to us, was tucked away in our unconscious waiting for the other pieces to fit the jigsaw puzzle” (97). Nellie sees understanding her family’s history as part of coming to grips with her own identity, which is a theme common in the Bildungsroman genre: “I saw that I only had half of the questions and answers and they the other half. I saw that if I knew all my kin ... Obadiah, Teena, Locksley, Uroy, I could no longer roam as a stranger; that I had to know them to know what I was about” (80). Thus, the novel puts its own spin on both the classic Euro-American and Black Bildungsroman by creating a rhizomorphic jigsaw puzzle narrative with the phrase “I came home” as a theme common to many Bildungsroman novels, namely the questions of what and who “I” am and what “home” means (e.g. 34, 40–41, 42, 44).

At the same time, while the narrative structure is non-linear, there is also a range of how clear the chronology of events is or to whom the text refers. For instance, it is not entirely certain as to whether Nellie does her social activism after she returns from Philadelphia to do her doctorate or before she goes. We know that Nellie knew Baba Ruddock “twenty years ago” at “school” and he asked her to go to a movie back then when she was sixteen (58, 16). Baba joins her activist group after Robin dies, so she must be at least in her mid-to-late thirties at the time (58). It is unclear as to when she is doing her job as a social

worker in an agency, though (44–45). I suspect her activism and social work are both after her return from Philadelphia, but I cannot be sure. For instance, early on in the novel when she narrates her idea that others might perceive her as mad after the death of her boyfriend Robin (“They will say you are mad and cannot hold a man.”), one sentence curiously *might* suggest that she leaves for school in America *after* her breakdown, when she has recovered: “Best leave this place altogether” (19–20). Brodber’s novel is therefore a kind of elliptical puzzle where facts are not always easy to ascertain. Indeed, as Kelly Baker Josephs notes, “At best, tracking time in *Jane and Louisa* is difficult, both in the protagonist’s life and in periods of Jamaican history. ... There are rarely straightforward statements in the text about temporality; the reader has to piece this information together from various clues” (120). For instance, the opening page of the novel has material about “Training College exams,” an engagement with a “ring,” and a pregnancy: “Let her see your waist” (8). It is only until much later in the novel that we learn this involves Alexander Richmond and his then-fiancée Sarah, who “was ashamed that she married Mrs. Becca Pinnock’s brother rather than finish her exams” (93). This is resonant with the non-linear lines of connection that Deleuze and Guattari discuss in relation to the concept of the rhizome. There are also linkages such as the mention of Granny Tucker’s “wiry black hands up to the elbows in khaki suds, cleanly singing” (7) on the opening page of the novel and then, “Granny Tucker’s wiry black hands, strong enough to scrub away khaki suds so why not to pull grass,” just near the end of the novel (146). Meanwhile, Baker Josephs adds that, “Along with puzzling chronology and references, Nellie’s narrative includes incomplete sentences, missed transitions, and connections based simply on the resonance of a word, phrase, or idea” (126). Thus, in addition to being rhizomorphic, which involves broken connections leading to new offshoots and tangents, the novel is also elliptical.

Undoubtedly, we, as readers, have to fill in a lot of gaps and look at clues to what is going on. For instance, the nature of Nellie’s mental breakdown is also not certain. Partially influenced by Brodber’s discussion of the novel and phrases such as the “fever in your blood” (Brodber 65) and the image of the “cracked up doll” (61), the general consensus among scholars is that Nellie has a full psychotic breakdown or is schizophrenic and that explains the fragmentary nature of the text. For example, Brown remarks that “Nellie’s madness” is “refracted in the chaos of Brodber’s literary text” (242). However, much of the evidence in the book points perhaps just to deep melancholy and grief, where she cries a lot over the death of her activist boyfriend Robin, such as, “who would build a trench to flow my tears to them” and “I wept and wept” (53), and is helped in her healing by Baba Ruddock, where she finally says, “Baba had settled me in with my people” (77). It is at the very least a matter for debate.

The strongest direct evidence for Nellie having a full mental breakdown is probably in “THE TALE OF THE SNAIL IN THE KUMBLA,” where there is an impressionistic and dizzying array of disordered thoughts such as “vomit up a scream,” a “transfiguration,” being “buried alive,” “falling,” and, “Let the electrodes of that brick wall activate every cell in your cranium” (Brodber 20). There is also Nellie’s perception that others will see her as psychotic: “They will say you are mad,” which may or may not be accurate (20). Nellie likewise mutters to herself “You are mad,” but a lot of the time in real life psychotic people do not realize they are psychotic; they just take their delusions and hallucinations as a new and undeniable reality (20). It is not as simple as saying Nellie is definitely psychotic temporarily or a schizophrenic. She also remarks that her friends in the government yard are “trying to keep me from breaking down,” but this could just be a clinical depression and grief breakdown from trauma because she adds that, “I wished to God they would just give me a chance to cry it out with all of me” (53). However, Nellie does fear madness at least when she thinks maybe “I was losing my grip on myself” (53). Kelly Baker Josephs is a little bit inconsistent on this, saying that Nellie is “never marked as mad in the novel” yet nevertheless also remarks that the novel, “seeks to speak from the inside, rather than to merely represent from a distance, the madness of a dissociated Jamaican woman,” implying that there is a strong relationship between the nature of Brodber’s textual strategies and Nellie’s mental state (119).

In any case, here a Caribbean notion of identity is relevant to Brodber’s rhizomorphic version of the Bildungsroman narrative form of the novel and Nellie’s character. The concept of Édouard Glissant’s archipelago in his theories on Relation are an indicator of how the Caribbean concept of identity may differ from continental ones. As H. Adlai Murdoch remarks about Glissant, “if here the figure of the archipelago is inscribed as both symbol and catalyst of diversity, it immediately separates itself in an important way from continental systems and their corollaries of universalism and totality” (876). Likewise, Nellie progresses in her development within Brodber’s Bildungsroman, but it is towards dispersal, diversity and relationality rather than totality and linear progress, a conception that is resonant with *Jane and Louisa*’s narrative strategies. Speaking of “Édouard Glissant’s Creolized World Vision,” Murdoch notes that on Glissant’s concept of Relation that

the larger theoretical concept of Relation (*la relation*) inscribes a non-hierarchical principle of unity, a relation of equality with and respect for the Other as *different* from oneself. On a larger scale, the concept presupposes a natural openness to other cultures. Any examination of the complexities of subjective identification drawn on the creolized Caribbean experience will bring into play important concepts of location, migration, and cultural cross-fertilization, as the intrinsic nature of the Caribbean phenomenon leads one to interrogate broader assumptions of identity and place. (876)

Likewise, in her “creolized Caribbean experience,” Nellie is caught in a non-hierarchical web of migration and cross-fertilization in her Jamaican culture, both rural and urban, and travels to the United States for a doctorate degree in school, and this informs what it means for her to have an identity and be from a location and ‘place’ in a relation with the Other in a similar manner described by Glissant. As I noted, rather than just one location or a linear narrative, Brodber’s rhizomorphic version of the Bildungsroman is a network of moments and multiple voices.

Jane and Louisa’s Bildungsroman is perhaps even more elliptical and rhizomorphic than Brodber’s 2014 novel *Nothing’s Mat*, although both have highly complex narrative structures. To be sure, Rebecca Romdhani notes of *Nothing’s Mat* that, “Like her previous novels, the structure on first reading is tricky, as it moves about in time, facilitates a multivocal narration, and includes many magical and spiritual elements”. Instead of rhizomorphic, Patricia Noxolo’s reading of Brodber’s *Nothing’s Mat* is fractal in its paradigm of Afro-Caribbean social formations, something noted by the unnamed protagonist’s teacher upon grading her school paper, where there would be repeated symmetrical patterns embedded in one another (iteration and recursion). The idea of relationality where there are no straight lines is similar to *Jane and Louisa* in terms of one’s complex and intricate relationship to family and community. Stephanie Koathes comments that in tracing her roots the protagonist in *Nothing’s Mat* eventually “does away with the usual straight lines and arrows of the standard family tree” (Koathes 492). Likewise, Noxolo writes of *Nothing’s Mat* that

It is clear that *Nothing’s Mat* works to replace the marginalizing notion of Caribbean family and community as “fractured” with a concept of community as “fractal.” ... Brodber’s narrator explains that these are fractal communities, in which people make complex, multiple connections one with another, generation after generation, in repeating patterns of seemingly ad hoc affinity and adoption, often simply because they care for each other. (43–44)

Indeed, the concept of establishing ‘multiple connections’ with many generations is highly resonant with both the *Nothing’s Mat* British-born protagonist traveling from London to Jamaica to trace her family’s roots and Nellie’s journey and her informal education that she receives from her friends and relatives about her family history and the community at large. Koathes remarks that

Nothing’s Mat may be the story of a fictional family history, but it is an intensely relatable narrative as it touches on the truth of family in the Caribbean context, a vast net, a looping pattern filled with far-flung relatives, closer-than-kin non-related family members, cousins upon cousins with even more cousins waiting to be discovered and pictures received from “foreign” resting on living-room tables [well, more likely on smartphones now]. (492–493)

Likewise, in an often-dizzying array, Nellie tells of her many siblings, cousins, other relatives and community members who are like family, where “everybody is related here” (Brodber 11). *Jane and Louisa* also parallels *Nothing’s Mat* in the trope of a protagonist trying to trace a tangled ‘family’ tree, including those who are not blood relatives but still part of the mat (an idea taken from roots in Africa and the slave trade, as the *Nothing’s Mat* protagonist later explains to her son Modibe). In *Nothing’s Mat* there are circles connected to each other on a mat while in *Jane and Louisa* there is a fragmented rhizome of interconnectedness in the text. However, in *Nothing’s Mat* it is just starts out as a school project to help her on the way to university rather than part of Nellie’s spiritual awakening and recovery from a mental breakdown. Nevertheless, like *Jane and Louisa*, *Nothing’s Mat* likewise has increasing “connections between the living and dead” as the novel moves along, something the unnamed protagonist (teasingly nicknamed “Princess” by her husband late in the novel) discovers on her return to Jamaica at the age of thirty to do further research (Romdhani). There is also a similarity between the two novels in that *Jane and Louisa* goes back near the end of the text to her great-grandfather Will while *Nothing’s Mat* traces back to the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 and then:

works forward again temporally, back through the same incidents, retelling them from a range of character perspectives and revealing new community connections, before spiraling through to a point after the moment the book began, where the narrator's life has now become a lot more hopeful through the exercise of weaving the fractal history of her family into the sisal mat. (Noxolo 43)

Truly, Brodber seems to have continued her unconventional approach to composing novels that began with *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*. Suffice it to say that Brodber's other novels follow a similar trend to some extent: *Myal: A Novel* (1988), *Louisiana* (1994), and *The Rainmaker's Mistake* (2007).

Thus, in its non-linear, elliptical, and polyvocal exploration of Nellie's life history within the regulative framework of her community, both in Jamaica and the US, Brodber's *Jane and Louisa* is indeed an unusual and challenging version of the Bildungsroman. Nellie exists in a network of dispersed relationships across time and space within culture and memory. As I will discuss more in the next section, in her own version of this narrative form, Brodber critically reworks the category of 'progress,' both personal and cultural-historical. Brodber's novel resituates the Bildungsroman's classic movement of progress/maturation/development by placing Nellie within changing networks of increased connectivity and juxtaposition of timespaces, the rhizomorphic, rather than within linear progression or a monolithic trunk-and-branches or center-periphery model of 'evolution' and global, colonial power relations. Rather than beginning with birth and moving through various stages of linear development (i.e. aging), *Jane and Louisa* is a Bildungsroman that does not establish a fully clear lineage; instead Brodber's novel is non-linear in a way that mimics the protagonist's position within an inter-connected matrix of historical narratives and tangled family, community and cultural histories. The novel is also polyvocal, with language ranging from creole patois such as, "Mass Nega, beg you mine yourself. Mi smell you dinner but mi no want none" (Brodber 12) or, "Mi sey when mi dip splash, you fi dip tip" (37) to the more standard English of "Miss Jenkins was referred to our agency for assistance in getting her twelve-year-old daughter Gertrude, to join its putative father Adolphus Henry overseas" (44) or "The term government yard denotes a set of ten rectangular rooms joined together" (49). These shifts in language are part of what makes the novel rhizomorphic. The novel also morphs into various formats quite often, sometimes setting the narrative up like a script for a play (see, for example 11–14) or making reference to her life being like a play, e.g. "I forgot my lines Aunt Becca as you knew I would" (26) or "Enter the male. No need to be discriminating: all the play calls for is a male" and "You ought to have torn up the script" (28).

The text of *Jane and Louisa* is a fragmented and rhizomorphic as a Bildungsroman, and Nellie learns of and experiences tangled webs of familial and community relationships through various forms of informal and formal education, which I will discuss in the final two sections respectively. Emerging through critical self-spectatorship, 'progress' here involves movement outward to the globe and inward to local community, family history, and the idiosyncratic subject, i.e. the concrete and specific individual identity, memory and perspective of personal life history. This idiosyncrasy stands in contrast to the well-known abstract notion of 'the subject' so often explored by postmodern and post-structuralist critical theory, even though that also pertains here since these theories often hold the subject fragmented and in flux much like Nellie is, a condition that the text performs for its readers.

II. Tangled Family Histories: Race, Class, and Cultural Progress

In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu interrogates bourgeois class reproduction through a phenomenon of "culture becoming natural" or "culture become nature" (234). Bourdieu describes how "unable to invoke the right of birth," the bourgeoisie generates a "sociodocry," justifying their class privilege through acquired culture that elides its cultivated acquisition, such as "taste," to appear as a natural "grace or a gift" and therefore "deserved" (234). Both Nellie and the novel critique how race in the 'colonial contest' appears as a naturalized marker of social subordination developed through systems of family inheritance to produce 'naturally' superior or inferior subjects. The novel puts into question colonial notions of 'progress' from (black, uncultured, 'common folk') 'underdevelopment' to (white, cultured, bourgeois or elite) 'development.' Nellie explores these complexities as she learns about her family's and community's tangled history through her informal education via friends and family. For instance, Great-Aunt Alice (on her father's side) says to Nellie that, "Is a good thing you have me to educate you my chile," and Nellie is poised to listen: "I read you Aunt Alice" (Brodber 40). Indeed, later in the novel when Nellie is older, Alice, who again may be deceased and a spirit at the time, shows Nellie her family history through a (likely metaphoric as a way to describe narration) film "projector" (132) and a "moving camera" (133) and a (possibly literal but also metaphoric) "lantern slide" show (132).

In Brodber's version of the Bildungsroman, race acts like class as it produces expectations that compartmentalize social mobility or transformation and works at odds with class in ways that open up immanent critique. In Bourdieuan terms, this empirical body operates in a *habitus*—the routinized set of behaviors, attitudes, dispositions and expectations that reproduce class structure—within the spaces of possibility of social fields. *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* nuances and expands Bourdieu's concept of the habitus by exploring how the embodied subjectivity is where the macroscopic and microscopic narratives become mapped and naturalized through racialization. Derron Wallace discusses possible Bourdieuan readings of race by saying that, "reading 'race' in Bourdieu marks the oft-invisible impact of whiteness on class relations" (913).⁶ Here, in relation to Brodber's novel, I would argue that race establishes a space of possibilities for the self-narrativization of class positions subjects feel they could reasonably inhabit, spaces that sometimes become experienced in terms of feudal-like boundaries and architecture. Nellie's father, Alexander Richmond, for example "grew up with the pale faces. He learnt from them that a man is worthy of his hire only after he has served well in his station; that he should stick to principles and know his limitations: the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate" (Brodber 30). However, with the word "castle" resonating with "caste" (53), larger cultural assumptions about a proper "station" change over time along with shifts in larger cultural-historical networks of power, in a manner akin to literary or artistic possibilities within authorship. Bourdieu remarks that a, "change in the space of literary or artistic possibilities is the result of change in the power relation which constitutes the space of positions" (32). Assumptions about limitations in relation to transindividual narratives of social positioning shift and open up within sociocultural tensions since iteration produces the naturalization of power.

As Nellie questions the naturalized relationship between socioeconomic class position and race, she interrogates one option of social advancement offered to her: racial "lightening" across generations that she learns of from her informal education from community members and relatives such as Alice (Brodber 7). It is not always fully clear where all of Nellie's informal education is coming from, but Alice is one major source. Nellie's paternal great grandfather is the upwardly mobile William Alexander Whiting, "the pale one"—a (mostly) Caucasian and Anglican son of Jamaican colonists involved with tobacco and cattle. With his last name as a play on the process of 'whiting' or 'whitening,' William embodies a racial skew towards whiteness: "he represented lines and generations of the watering down of the stock. Still this was one more white to correct the one to ten skew" (134). While William's parents, Albert and Elizabeth Whiting, are initially "poor white," they view themselves as progressing economically and teleologically towards a social status inscribed by the entitlement of their specific racial mixture, especially with William as the hope of the future: "This was their first fruit, chubby and as intelligent as number eleven mango with a purpose. His purpose was to help them take another step towards their *rightful place*" (134, my emphasis).

Eventually, Albert gains a reputation as an up-and-comer in terms of socioeconomic status, "fast becoming big massa, hirer or labour, lender of money, powerful miller to the little colony of hillside blacks seeking to grow their way out of their thatched cottages and into the soil" (Brodber 135). Here, the word 'grow' involves a notion of linear progress or racial 'uplift' into professions such as farming. The model here is of the cultivation of nature to produce better ends over time. The novel denaturalizes this supposed cultivation (through things like informal and formal education) that leads to growth towards 'higher' forms of civilization and culture instituted by the colonial mindset. The idea of planting in "soil" here seems to involve a paradigm of cultivation and development, namely a relationship to the firm groundings of power where 'progress' can occur, as opposed to the "thatched cottages" involved in "underdevelopment" (135, 46).

Here, the novel explores the relationship between race and power within colonialism and pre-independence Jamaica. After his wife dies, Albert is left to raise his children with his Jamaican-born Nanny Madame Faith, a "kindly old negress," who takes over fully parenting duty of, "his eleven red-necked children" when Albert then dies of dysentery (Brodber 136). Albert's son William, who is a "colourless man with natural blinders" (140), becomes involved in a relationship with Tia Maria, Faith's goddaughter or "goddy" (136). The two were "not just fruitful and vigorous lovers: they were fruitful and vigorous workers as well" (136–137).

⁶ As Derron Wallace explains, Bourdieu does touch on race in the context of caste in works such as *The Algerians* (1962), but in a somewhat different way than I am doing: "Bourdieu's introductory ethnographic account of Algerian life during the war of independence, showcases his sensitivity to 'race' and racism as social factors that complicate class (dis)advantage. As such, while an awareness of 'race' and ethnicity does not pervade all, or even most, of Bourdieu's oeuvre, his discussions of 'race,' racism and segregation in select works reveal that considerations of racial and ethnic inequality were not altogether absent" (908). Wallace importantly adds that "Bourdieu's anti-racist framework was squarely rooted in a radical anti-colonial position. He envisaged anti-colonialism and anti-racism as interrelated liberation projects" (910).

Tia knows herself to be a, “lucky little girl who missed the slavery days by a hair’s breadth” (137).⁷ William is a “happy sinner” who is not ashamed of his miscegenation nor his ‘mixed-race’ offspring: “though men have sired khaki children, and left bequests to them, they do not expect to see them playing on their father’s knees” (137–138). Nevertheless, William’s dark-skinned Afro-Jamaican lover Tia Maria clearly understands the link between race and power, and she steers her family towards whiteness: “There were his people and there were her people and she knew who had the power” (138). Drawing attention to how a “people” is constructed through available cultural categories within certain regulative frameworks, Tia’s analysis is both a practical assessment of her social field and a tragic perpetuation of the legacy of slavery through psychological schemas. Hence, as a form of self-erasure, Tia, who “did everything to annihilate herself ... her skin, her dress, her smell” (139), wants her mixed-race children to pattern themselves after their father and relishes the annihilation of her own language and culture—the increase of social and historical distance from her:

In truth, the more she denied herself, the more things around her grew. The lesson was clear: the path was becoming clearer: the things she loved would prosper in inverse ratio to her disappearance. Tia wanted it so that with a snap of her fingers she could disappear and her children would loom large in their place in the sun. The stranger the words her children spoke, the happier she felt. The fewer their experiences she could share, the more *progress* they had made. The more they turned their backs on her, the more her smile widened into the classic cheshire grin. (Brodber 139, my emphasis)

Tia’s tragic model of racial and cultural progress aligns itself with colonial models of education, class and racial hierarchy as a form of adaptation at the cost of self-erasure. The shift of “progress” here is both of shared language and shared experiences, or lack thereof. Her attitudes are another permutation of her regulative cultural framework within which she dwells and experiences herself as a spectator of/in history in relation to other regulative frameworks. Master narratives coordinate the overlap of regulative frameworks and inform the idiosyncratic subject’s experience within collectivities. To her, blackness and black culture are positioned ideologically within a colonially informed schema as ‘before’ and ‘below’ while whiteness is ‘above’ and ‘the future.’

Therefore, Brodber’s reworking of the Bildungsroman form is essential to understanding Nellie’s understanding of race because it involves a tangled rhizome of interconnections and moments of time in a web of cross-fertilizations rather than a linear progression that Tia Maria sees as racial ‘progress’ from dark to light and from ‘backwards’ to ‘enlightened’ (in the senses of race, culture and education). Brodber’s take on the Bildungsroman thus relates to race and class and aligns itself with the idea of the rhizomorphic here because Nellie’s informal education from people like Alice involves untangling and exploring networks of interconnection that constantly move and transform in her own life and those of her ancestors in a way that stands in opposition to Tia Maria’s concept of racial “progress,” as Tia Maria calls it. Tia Maria’s paradigm would be a model more akin to the conventionally linear movement in a classic Bildungsroman (with a colonial spin) from immaturity and childhood (i.e. blackness and traditional ‘common folk’ Afro-Caribbean culture) to maturity and adulthood (i.e. increasing whiteness and more Euro-American culture). An interrogation of ‘progress’ in the way that Tia Maria envisions it is important for the “khaki” Nellie (who also describes her Aunt Becca as “khaki”) and Afro-Caribbean subjects more widely because it counters the denigration and systemic racism and classism found in the linear colonial model, where some view the traditional culture in places like Jamaica as ‘underdeveloped’ and inferior (94). This supposed inferiority informs the Afro-Caribbean subjects’ sense of value, worth and identity, and the rhizomorphic narrative calls this racist and classist notion into question by making things fragmented and non-linear.

Tia Maria therefore relishes the growing distance between her own ‘outdated’ regulative framework of black culture and the ‘progress’ of her descendants towards white, Euro-American culture and epidermal lightening. She aligns her hope for her descendants’ social advancement with William’s ‘white world’ of bourgeois aspiration:

The more their kumblas billowed out and hardened into white steel helmets separating her from each and each from each, the more peacefully she rested, the more sure she was that they had found their places in the established world to which William belonged, a world that was foreign to her, a world that was safe and successful. (Brodber 139)

⁷ The British Empire fully emancipated Jamaican slaves by 1838, so that gives readers a sense of the historical timeline here.

Because of an unbounded hope for her descendants' racial and cultural advancement, Tia eventually lapses into madness, "went clear out of her mind," triggered when her daughter Kitty, "got pregnant and decided to marry the [dark-skinned] Pattoo" Puppa Richmond, Nellie's paternal grandfather—hence undoing some of the racial 'progress' (141). Indeed, rather than buying into Tia Maria's notions of racialized social mobility, Kitty has an affinity for Afro-Caribbean culture and, "liked the music, not of the piano, but of the drums, of tramping feet, steel drum and bamboo fifes" (139).

Meanwhile, William, who "had no head for business," also undoes economic progress when he eventually loses his fortunes—a denaturalization of the relationship between race and class (Brodber 141). Nellie's family does not inherit whatever land and money he did retain because William did not legally marry Tia and had not made a will. Here there is a double play on the word "will." Will's brothers, instead "took what was lawfully theirs" and "Great grandfather Will willed us nothing but his abstract self and what cocoons we could make out of it" (141). Thus, the novel not only details how colonial subjects can emerge within Eurocentric world-historical 'masterplots' with a sense of racial, economic and cultural inferiority, but also how the Law encodes distributions of property and social positioning that reinscribe the relationship between race and class. Laws governing marriage and property inheritance also embed idiosyncratic subjects into larger cultural narratives about what is and is not recognized as a 'proper' relationship by the authority of both the nation state and the imagined collective community. The Law is not merely a set of rules governing behavior in a culture, but a regulative framework that maps idiosyncratic subjects' social positions and insertions into larger cultural stories, how they find "their places" (139).

III. The Lump of Anger: Formal Education and Racialization

In addition to her interrogation of the cultural-historical system that equates 'progress' with racial 'lightening' and class in her informal education from people like Alice, Nellie also explores and critiques cultural 'enlightenment' via formal education and all that ensues from it. To be sure, Brodber's version of the Bildungsroman puts into question the linear narrative of education as one advances through a system, either informal or formal, and moves into a non-linear rhizome of moments that all bring realizations and learning about culture, society, and history, much like Nellie's informal education gives her understandings about her family history. Indeed, Brodber's narrative form reflects Nellie's psychology, learning, and embeddedness within various communities in both Jamaica and the United States. Nellie is ambivalent to Euro-American notions of progress because she moves ever more fully into her Afro-Caribbean roots as she gets older but, at the same time, attains a K-12 education in Jamaica and eventually a doctoral degree in Philadelphia, which seems to be in medicine (33) or social work (44–45). Despite mention of a "scholarship" (8), which may be an undergraduate one, it is not stated whether or not Nellie goes to university before her doctoral degree program, part of the elliptical nature of the text.

Along with the Law and conceptualization of racial inheritance connected to culture that Nellie learns about in her informal education within her family, the formal educational system also propagates naturalized cultural ideals of being 'naturally gifted.' Even acquired cultural training, such as 'taste,' has hidden itself to appear 'naturally different.' This "culture become nature," as Bourdieu puts it, seems to inform the social positioning within the "global allegory of 'natural' social difference" (37) that Heather McClintock describes; in other words, Panoptical time maps out race and culture within a space of possibilities for social location (Bourdieu 235). Without an ability to invoke a ready-made inherited aristocratic privilege, the bourgeoisie "can resort to cultivated nature and culture become nature," a faux-inheritance "to what is sometimes called 'class,' through a tell-tale slip, to 'education'" (235). Bourdieu adds that education here is in the sense of a "product of education, to distinction, grace which is merit and merit which is grace, an unacquired merit which justifies unmerited acquisitions, that is to say, inheritance" (235). Here I am connecting these distinctions to both race and cultural capital (see Wallace).

Thus, Nellie explores these issues in connection with her formal education in both Jamaica and the United States and all that arises from it. In short, by examining the interchange of race and formal education as interrelated, but distinct categories of social positioning, *Jane and Louisa* dissects the logic of inheritance in this naturalization process, which slips between acquired cultivation and 'natural' superiority. At the same time, coming out of her formal education is an ambivalence to various racial and class categorizations as well as the idea of social mobility.

In particular, Brodber's novel interrogates the naturalized connections and telltale slips between skin color, education and social advancement. Having been marked out as 'one to watch' because of her light skin and social background, Nellie's outstanding performance when she is young allows her progress to a different 'class,' which implies both classroom groupings of students and models of social hierarchy. Nellie

explains that she skipped over grades in school partially due to her “brightness” (Brodber 7): “I am six and little for my age yet inspector says I should be skipped to middle division, to a class of children at least five years older than I” (35). *Jane and Louisa* opens with a statement of a constricting imagination for possibilities: “Papa’s grandfather and Mama’s mother were the upper reaches of our world” (7). However, this condition of possibilities seems to have an implied progressive movement, which Nellie sarcastically details: “So we were brown, intellectual, better and apart, two generations of lightening blue-blacks and gracing elementary schools with brightness. The cream of the earth, isolated, quadroon, mulatto, Anglican” and “khaki” (7). Connecting race and education, “brightness” (7) here is a play on having both light skin and being intellectually gifted, and Nellie also engages in various forms of cultural capital that show she is educated, such as the love of Shakespeare that her father instills in her (30).

Thus, Brodber’s novel complicates and extends Bourdieu’s investigations of bourgeois class reproduction by considering how cultural constructions of race become equivocated with a ‘natural’ difference of merit visible in skin color within colonialism and postcolonialism. The distinction appears to be an inherited racial quality that is only fulfilled, rather than acquired, through cultural capital. At the same time, the novel draws attention to the transplanting of a Euro-American regulative framework of class and education onto non-European soil with non-European subjects. With “cream” as both white in color and that which rises to the top, racial lineage and education become two forms of ‘heritage’ that slip into each other to create systems of naturalized and visible markers of class hierarchy within the colonial system (Brodber 7). Nellie uses the term “caste,” as in, “Not because I had stepped out of caste or anything like that” (53) when she stumbles into a gambling den while living in the government yard during her activism years; this caste mentality seems to have partially arisen from her formal education.

The phrase “lightening blue-blacks” (7) here echoes not only a link between Enlightenment narratives of progress and freedom through reason and skin lightening across generations but also blue-bloods. Obfuscating the process of culturally acquired distinction, difference and hierarchy, the status of ‘blue-blood’ denotes a category of aristocratic social positioning where social superiority and elite status appear genetic, biological and natural. Class reproduction amongst an elite group takes on the appearance of a naturalized superiority based entirely on the ‘pedigree’ of bloodlines. As Michael Quinion explains, the phrase “blue blood” derives from the Spanish “sangre azul,” where, “many of the oldest and proudest families of Castile used to boast that they were pure bred, having no link with the Moors who had for so long controlled the country, or indeed any other group.” As evidence for their pure breeding, these “blue-bloods” pointed to their skin, which merely showed blue-tinted venous blood more because it was lighter. The English took over the term in the 1830s, and thus the resonance between “blue blood” and the color “blue black” recalls the imbrication of race and the cultural elite within the British Empire.

However, Nellie does not simply eschew the British education system in favor of a myopic fetishization of folk communalism, though. Her community and familial relations are a regulative framework that are a locus of historical contradictions that grounds itself in an ambivalence that sees both the restrictive and expansive potentiality of all education and belief. As the “pale one,” Nellie’s paternal “great grandfather Will was romance” and he embodies the hope of travel and change, both in terms of status and geography, that European-based education can bring: “At school he gave us Maths, Latin and French and told us pranks at Cambridge where we would surely go if we did well ... across the sea, always across something with great-grandfather Will” (Brodber 30–1). The ‘giving’ here may be literal or figurative. Again, it is unclear whether Nellie knew Will in real life or as a spirit at church since she remarks that she met him at “communion every month” and notes that “He was so nice” (30). In any case, as a key marker of social capital within Jamaica’s British-based system, formal education aligns individual *Bildung* to larger cultural narratives of development and freedom that establish a central core or ‘trunk’ of social evolution and various peripheral ‘branches’ of culture. Meanwhile, Nellie’s maternal Granny Tucker seems to only connect slavery with the lack of education rather than ideological constructions of race or a pernicious socioeconomic system: “You never could get Granny Tucker to admit that her grandfather had been a slave. No Sir. He was a brown man who could read and write” (31). Despite Granny Tucker’s willful denial of her ancestor’s place within slavery, her understanding implies a freedom of the mind that expands spaces of possibility via learning for group identities.

As forms of networks that are loci of historical contradictions, collective identities are paradoxically both potentially liberatory and overly restrictive, an insight that Nellie gains from her time in the United States, where she studies for a doctorate degree. Again, Nellie’s degree is unclear because she notes that other black people say she is “a doctor and their own” (Brodber 33), which might denote a medical degree, but the novel also says she is a social worker in Jamaica so her doctorate degree may be in social work unless she does that before her doctorate or, alternately, she does not work in medicine when she returns home (44–45). In

any case, she experiences racism while at school in 'Sam's country'—Philadelphia in the United States. Set in the early days of desegregation, Nellie finds it to be "beautiful" and a "romantic country" until she says that she hears others talking about her behind her back: "Shushing at my approach but I had already heard that 'Negroes in the Central Areas were ungrateful considering that our people were the first to let them fit clothes in department stores'" (32). Even though she feels "the liberty of foreign students to be strange," Nellie searches for a language with which to describe this experience of racialization and express the "big frozen lump [of anger] in [her] throat" in a way that will reach others" (27, 32). Nellie says there is "No language, no public language of politeness, no communion rails now to separate the communicant and the celebrant. It is a brand new n****r war and I must find the language of abuse with which to reach them" (32). She dissects both her anger and the frozen taxonomies of race, creating a trope of intermingling akin to that between the priest and flock in the spectacle of the Catholic mass.

Nellie never quite feels at peace with this American blackspace during her advanced studies, and she finds herself "reaching for Corpie's hand to find that I am not home" (33). Corpie, Nellie's maternal grandfather, fought in the Boer War and died before Sarah, Nellie's mother, was born. The Germans called Corpie "monkey" and he "hated them with all his gall" because they interpellated him as culturally 'primitive' or 'less evolved' biologically on the evolutionary tree (30). Corpie experienced both overt and unspoken racism: the "English were hypocrites and worse than Americans who at least told you plainly to your face that they didn't like you" (30). Converse to Corpie, who "was angry all right," Nellie sarcastically remarks that "displays of anger must be trained out of the new generation. It is an Adam's apple, an indelicate bulge which appears in the throat" (30–1). The Adam's apple implies both the knowledge of good and evil that cast out Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the sins and traumas of the past infiltrating the present, and hope for the future in finding a language-not-yet-made.

While in the U.S., Nellie experiences an ambivalent critical self-spectatorship of the collective identification and self-definition formed through shared racialization. At the Philadelphia institution where she pursues her advanced education, most of the janitorial staff who are "pushing mops, pushing pails, [and] straightening here and there" are black: "Every evening after five, those who look most like me surface to take over the institution" (32). In addition to the sense of 'straightening up' while cleaning, the word "straightening" here plays upon the process of straightening of black hair or smoothing out the tangled mess of racial history. Nellie sees herself in the mirror of their spectatorship of her; she makes them proud because she is "a doctor and their own," "their people" (33). Despite her experiences of civil rights and Black Power movements in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, though, Nellie immanently critiques formulations of collective identity and advancement based on the commonality of skin color. Deeply ambivalent, Nellie remarks that it is bizarre how the notion of a unity of race, an artificial shared blackness of pseudo-solidarity—as Paul Gilroy calls it in *Against Race* (2000)—comes into being through societal-historical homogenization and massification brought about by systemic oppression. As Nellie comments, "Strange how a common enemy tightens bonds so that we are people where once we had been men, women, carpenters, cooks, nurse's aides, doctors, light-skinned-curley-haired, black-too-dark-to-make-the-TV-screen" (Brodber 33).

Part of her defamiliarizing un-homing is from the American regulative framework of early desegregation while another part is from her critical distance from an assumed and automatic racial solidarity that emerges in the contrast and comparison between Jamaica and the United States. While Nellie's anger temporarily subsides as she claims to feel "submerged in [her] people," she experiences a melancholic ambivalence here at the "surgery" that removes the "lump in her throat" (Brodber 33). She has found her voice and catharsis only in the abstraction of differences and idiosyncrasies of collective massification: "thawed into four hours of tears on my bathroom and I emerged from this surgery, black, taken now for an African, now for a negro, a n****r" (Brodber 33). In the USA during studies, her experience of black identity thus becomes uncanny [*unheimlich*] in the Freudian sense—something familiar, commonplace and 'home' rendered unfamiliar, estranged, 'un-homed' (Freud 217). Part of the 'return of the repressed' here is Nellie's awakening to the larger historical conditions for identity formation emerging out of slavery and colonialism. As she returns to Jamaica after completing her degree, her homeland also becomes uncanny. In the text, she repeats the phrase "I came home" like a mantra, as if she is trying to convince herself things are the same, note that these returns home are not all at the same time, which implies a multiple entry into the text for readers of this rhizomorphic text (e.g. 34, 40–42, 44). If we take Nellie as an example development and growth for the Afro-Caribbean subject might take the form of increased connections to a network of community relations and forms of culture for those who do not buy into the colonial notions of progress through movement towards Euro-American frameworks. Brodber's version of the Bildungsroman as a rhizomorphic network of timespaces and multiple voices foregrounds this Afro-Caribbean notion of progress, yet, at the time, Nellie

also participates in the Euro-American version because she attains a doctorate in the United States. Thus, she is caught in forms of ambivalence between both versions of progress.

Nellie navigates her idiosyncratic relationship to collective identities as a locus of cultural-historical tensions. Her return from university in Philadelphia (although, as I have stated elsewhere, it is unclear as to whether her activism and time in the government yard is before or after she goes to the United States for an advanced degree to become a doctor of some sort) also brings into collision various regulative frameworks operating through cultural narratives of 'progress' and its interrelationship with a social matrix of race, class, education and culture. She appears to apply her formal education (at whatever level it is at that point)—and informal education from friends and family as well—to a new understanding of Jamaica. Here, Nellie sees how race and class spatially map both colonial and postcolonial subjects through the figurative language of a 'proper place' in the world. They also create routinized expectations, vocations and aspirations within the regulative frameworks through the organization, not simply of language and culture, but of physical environments as well. For instance, seemingly in the government yard, there is a fire of unknown origin (possibly spontaneous combustion) that kills Robin, her boyfriend and fellow political activist whose death seems to be the biggest impetus behind her melancholy and possible mental breakdown. Robin, "got caught up in the spirit and burnt to grease like beef suet caught in a dutchie pot" (Brodber 52). Around this time, Nellie lives in one of the identical rooms at 25, 5th street houses—one of a series of identical government yards built—"for the people," where "each room is of the exact same size as the other and has the exact same fittings" (49). The other yards are "all alike" too, yet they are free: a "gift" for "us the indigent, who have been made so by fire, hurricane or some other catastrophe," except for the cost of "maintenance" (49). It is not clear how Nellie fits into that. Architecturally, like her experiences of racialization in the U.S., the government yard embodies the possible danger of homogenization and submersion in a collective identity of a "people" (49). Caroline A. Brown rightfully also sees alienation here, arguing that, "Nellie, a young physician of mixed racial ancestry, indoctrinated into Eurocentric psychosocial and discursive systems, is alienated both from Afro-Jamaican culture and herself" (241). Brown expands on the idea of compartmentalization involved in Nellie's activist group and her alienation from them:

Even as she loses herself in her fitful weeping, she admits the social segregation to which she and her fellow activists choose to adhere. Notwithstanding her commitment to the uplift of 'the folk,' the Afro-Caribbean proletariat who share her urban housing project, the fact is that they remain an abstraction to her. (243)

Kelly Baker Josephs likewise finds the novel is about the "alienation of the colonial subject," adding that "Brodber explores the problematics of social mobility and role expectations predicated on colonial values" (119). In this moment of the text, I would argue that Nellie also sees a need to critically evaluate compartmentalization in ways that echo the social and physical compartmentalization of the population, and this critique may form part of both her alienation and sense of ambivalence towards *both* Afro-Jamaican and Euro-American culture, including the colonial legacy in Jamaica that runs into the post-colonial era.

In her activist work, Nellie shifts away the bourgeois value of "brightness" (Brodber 7) from her elementary school days, which she recounts at various points in the text, towards neo-Marxist conceptions of transformative praxis and commitment that critiques the notion of "underdevelopment" in a way that Robin had talked about as an activist leader (46). Despite her general interrogation of and ambivalence towards class-consciousness and its relationship to race, though, at a few moments she nevertheless reinscribes hierarchical distinctions based on a spatialized conception of the collective project of 'our people' into a "them and us" paradigm (53). For instance, she remarks that there "are some of us who don't try at all. No need to hide it. We have unfortunately to make a distinction between them and us. Those people throw dice, slam dominoes and give-laugh-for-peasoup all day long" (51). Here, Nellie reconstructs class-like distinctions within collective identity by distinguishing between those who align their aspirations with the cultural, economic and political 'progress' of the collective and those who do not. However, after Robin dies, she also hears a speech that says, "the people were destined to come into their own," so there is hope too for all of the "*demos*," and she realizes that "my young man had not died in vain" (52).

In this complex and ambivalent relationship to the rhetoric of uplift, Nellie reinstates a hierarchy of cultural distinctions based on degrees of commitment—active versus passive spectatorship of history—where she annihilates the cultural identity of the uncommitted to political activism. "They have no culture at all," Nellie explains,

no sense of identity, no shame or respect for themselves ... No interest in helping their leaders keep their heads up high. We get no co-operation from them. How will we ever lead them out in the right and proper way, through the front gate, past the turnstile, past Miss D, proud, skilled, cultured and tall? (Brodber 51)

Miss D is "bad" but "knows who is who" and "leadership when she sees it" (51). Echoing her Aunt Becca's conception of "those people" (17) except now in the regulatory frame of neo-Marxism, Nellie's language of distinction takes on the form of physical structures: "Those people would climb through the barbed-wire fence, mingle shamelessly with the people beyond, beg them rum and cigarettes and creep back into the compound" (51). Nellie draws a line, remarking that, "There is very little mixing between them and us" (53). Thus, "those people" traverse both physical and social barriers in a shameless manner and mingle with those 'beyond' who do not even register in Nellie's purview at the time. Zain A. Muse describes Nellie's initial "classist pretension" and, "demeaning practice of anthropomorphizing her own culture" in the, "pseudo-intellectual liberation group dedicated to meaningless theorizing" (241). Indeed, despite her neo-Marxist pretensions blended with postcolonialist ideas, Nellie's ambivalently spatialized cultural spectatorship risks merely replicating the bourgeois regulative ideals of race and class within colonial discourse and its tropes of cultural architecture, within postcolonialism after Jamaican independence from the United Kingdom on August 6, 1962 (although it currently remains part of the Commonwealth of Nations).

Yet, Nellie's eventual maturation and increased self-awareness do not involve an abandonment of the 'Western' tradition and theorizing in favor of a wholesale embrace of the "Afrofemcentric" culture that Muse and June E. Roberts laud, though, but a navigation and critique of *both* 'common' Afro-Caribbean culture *and* more 'advanced' 'Western' modes of thought and bodies of knowledge, art, literature, music and so forth. An uncritical fetishization of communal folk culture would be just as myopic, though. Meanwhile, Nellie's felt affinity for 'common' and non-elite Afro-Caribbean culture, not to mention her imaginative communing with her living relatives and ancestors seen in chapter ten of "TO WALTZ WITH YOU" (where her age is unclear), nevertheless helps her to develop an immanent critique of the regulative framework of her activist work via ambivalence. In her ambivalence, Nellie interrogates the dangers of massification in all forms of collective identity, especially the self-policing and ostracization of the anomaly. In her activist group, she explains that, "I was suddenly strongly aware that I wanted a grave beneath the earth with the flowers and the sound of raucous singing" even though her activist friends considered such thoughts as "subversive," making her "a loner" (Brodber 53). Michael Niblett comments on the ambivalence of Nellie's political activism group by saying that

there is something of the ambivalence of the kumbula evident here: the group's ideological debates form a protective vessel around their ideals of change, yet serve too as a barrier to establishing the kind of connection to those in the tenement yard with whom they live that would facilitate this change. (10)

Indeed, Nellie is ambivalent, simultaneously attracted to the idea that "the masses [...] too were the architects of our freedom" and holds this in tension with nagging doubt that a "people" based purely on skin color and a "common enemy" is problematic (55, 33). Even though she values the masses, she realizes there is a danger in submerging one's idiosyncratic doubts for "the good of the whole" or becoming as "all alike" as the government yard houses are (58, 49).

In Conclusion, *In Medias Res*: The Globe is Just Around the Corner

Ultimately, Erna Brodber's novel *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* is a Bildungsroman, but does not move neatly from childhood to adult maturation; instead Brodber's novel is a rhizomorphic, non-linear, elliptical, fragmented and polyvocal text that mimics the protagonist's position within an inter-connected matrix of historical narratives and tangled family histories. Her ancestry not only traces to a mixed-race couple, but that coupling is simply a node in the crisscrossing exchanges of colonial history and the slave routes/roots of the Middle Passage. Through various modes of narrative and Nellie's informal and formal educations and all that ensues from them, including deep feelings of ambivalence towards both Euro-American and Afro-Caribbean culture and history, Brodber's novel operates at different scales and degrees of abstraction, a "kaleidoscope" with "myriad pieces of crystal littered round this base" that are "people" (Brodber 76). Both Nellie and an emergent Jamaica learn that the, "voice belongs to the family group dead and alive. We walk

by their leave, for planted in the soil, we must walk over them to get where we are going" (12). Note that this insight occurs early on in the text rather than just at the end, but the relationship to her age is unclear. Since the idea that "everybody is related" goes well beyond Nellie's rural village to encompass not simply Jamaica, but the weave-in-motion of the hubbed network of global interconnectedness, the 'small world' and so-called 'six degrees of separation' in complex global systems (11). Indeed, instead of a linear chronological narrative, *Jane and Louisa* spatializes time within the Bildungsroman genre, constructing a rhizomorphic network of interconnected moments of timespaces filtered through Nellie's consciousness and informal and formal educations, where subjectivity remains fragmented. The idea of "I came home" (e.g. 44) is perhaps, like a rhizome, always 'in the middle' of an internalized and romanticized version of one's birthplace and that of one's ancestors, the "locus" of the kaleidoscope that will "never change" (76). Or perhaps the locus is just Nellie's psyche. In any case, the desire for a centre and harmony at the personal and local community level allows for an engagement with the global geo-cultural matrix in a way that take Nellie's deeper into local history and culture.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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