

EVIDENCE OF JEWISH IDENTITY IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC WORK OF CLAUDE

CAHUN

by

ANGELA CHRISTINE WOODLEE

(Under the Direction of Nell Andrew)

ABSTRACT

Many scholars have explicated a theory of identity politics at work in the photographs and writings of Claude Cahun (1894-1954), but most of these have focused on a lesbian identity and a visual vocabulary of sexuality. Although Cahun herself made mention of her Jewish identity, previous scholarship scarcely acknowledges this fact, much less the complex social and political associations conjured by such references. This gap in the literature is particularly glaring when one considers the historic period in which she lived. This thesis puts Cahun's photographic and literary allusions to Jewishness in the context of attitudes toward French Jews in the period leading up to World War II. By examining an under-explored component of her photographic interrogation of identity, this thesis illuminates Cahun's ambivalence toward her Jewish identity specifically and, thereby, her questioning of the notion of categories of identity as a whole.

INDEX WORDS: Claude Cahun; Jewish identity; ethnicity; photography; self-portraits; self-representation; Surrealism; *Nosferatu*; France

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ANGELA CHRISTINE WOODLEE
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ANGELA CHRISTINE WOODLEE

Major Professor: Nell Andrew

Committee: Shelley Zuraw
Isabelle Wallace

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2012

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Rick and Merle Woodlee in honor of their unwavering support of my pursuit of education and knowledge.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Though most scholarship on the photographer and writer Claude Cahun mentions her Jewish background in the biographical introduction to the artist, rarely do authors provide any elaboration on her religious affiliation. Cahun typically is called a "French Jewish artist" with no other mention of a Jewish identity made throughout. When her Jewish identity is given attention, the discussion does not broach Jewishness as a source of self-identification. Instead, it is generally limited to the context of the Nazi era, particularly her decision to flee Paris for what would have seemed safer ground in Jersey Island in 1937 and her imprisonment by the Nazis as a result of her subversive anti-German propaganda during Jersey's occupation.¹ The limited discussion of her Jewish identity is especially surprising when one considers that the "Jewish question" in France was pervasive during Cahun's lifetime; it was hardly limited to World War II. Cahun was born in Nantes, France in 1894 and died on the Channel island of Jersey in 1954. Those sixty years bore the weight of renewed anti-Semitism from the Dreyfus Affair's wake to the collaborative Vichy government. These can be added to events in Cahun's private life that would mirror her Jewish identity back to her through her treatment by others. For instance, in 1906 the French government pardoned and released Captain Alfred Dreyfus after nearly ten years spent in prison. After his release, Cahun was the victim of an anti-Semitic attack by her classmates. As a result, Cahun was pulled from her school in Nantes and educated for a year in

¹ Laura "Lou" Bailey and Lizzie Thynne, "Beyond Representation: Claude Cahun's Monstrous Mischief-Making" *History of Photography* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 135-48; Mary Ann Caws, "Claude Cahun: Island of Courage," in *Glorious Eccentrics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 127-40; Michael Löwy, "Claude Cahun: The Extreme Point of the Needle," in *Morningstar: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 65-82.

Surrey, England.² Such an incident would have communicated to Cahun that her countrymen perceived her as a Jew.

Claude Cahun's photographs began to draw interest from scholars after her first solo exhibition opened posthumously in Paris in 1985. Her 1920s and 30s self-portraits were belatedly rediscovered by scholar François Leperlier only in the early 1980s, but the timing also led art historians to connect her photographs to a prescience of the decade's discussion surrounding the performative and constructed nature of gender roles and identities. Appearing in drag in several of these self-portraits, Cahun calls attention to the external, visible factors which forge one's identity. Scholars have regularly relied on Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* to lend credence to their readings of gender performativity in her work, while also invoking sources contemporaneous to Cahun, such as Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* and Joan Riviere's 1929 article "Womanliness as Masquerade."³ Tirza True Latimer points to individual portraits of Cahun and her partner Marcel Moore (née Suzanne Malherbe) in similar settings and similar poses and contends that the alternation or mirroring is an explicit statement of their identity as lesbians and as a couple.⁴ Although gender and sexual identity issues are fundamental to her work, more recent scholarship on Cahun has shown an interest in illustrating other issues at work in her photographs. Rosalind Krauss plants Cahun firmly in the overall trends exhibited in Surrealist photography in Paris during the 20s and 30s, such as the marvelous and Georges

² François Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: L'exotisme interieur*, (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006), 28.

³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1990); Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1921); Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929): 303-13.

⁴ Tirza True Latimer, "'Narcissus and Narcissus': Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore," in *Women Together/Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 68-104; Latimer, "Entre Nous: Between Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 2 (2006): 197-216.

Bataille's *informe*.⁵ Other feminist scholars see Cahun's self-portraits as critiquing Surrealist conventions of feminine objectivity and the female body as site of male sexual desire and anxiety from within those conventions.⁶ Miranda Welby-Everard calls attention to Cahun's appearances in Parisian theater and suggests that the so-called self-portraits, in which she is variously costumed, are about her theatrical rather than personal identity.⁷

Cahun's portraits and self-portraits, however, engage with issues of identity in multiple ways at once, and previous interpretations of Cahun's work curiously underplay her self-conscious identification as a Jewish person. Studies may mention as a mere biographical note that she came from a well-to-do Jewish family, but the reality is more complicated. Her father was from a Jewish family, but her mother was a Christian from an anti-Semitic family. Because Halachic rules state that Jewishness is matrilineal, she would have been considered a gentile rather than a Jew. Her immediate family did not practice the religion, either. In fact, her father Maurice Schwob was an atheist and staunchly opposed to the Church having a role in government.⁸ Thus her self-conscious adoption of the well-recognized Jewish name Cahun--a French form of Cohen--must have held other significance for the artist in post-Dreyfus affair France. Her birth name Lucy Schwob would have already been recognized as Jewish.

She tried out several pseudonyms before finally settling on Claude Cahun. Her writings frequently refer to what she calls her curlew nose, and her first pseudonym was Claude Courlis--

⁵ Rosalind Krauss, "Claude Cahun and Dora Maar: By Way of Introduction," in *Bachelors* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999): 1-50.

⁶ Whitney Chadwick, "Claude Cahun and Lee Miller: Problematizing the Surrealist Territories of Gender and Ethnicity," in *Gender Nonconformity, Race, and Sexuality: Charting the Connections*, ed. Toni Lester (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 141-59; Sharla Hutchison, "Convulsive Beauty: Images of Hysteria and Transgressive Sexuality: Claude Cahun and Djuna Barnes," in "Theory Trouble," eds. Ian Buchanan and Jeffrey R. Di Leo, special issue, *symplokē* 11, no. 1/2 (2003): 212-26; Amelia Jones, "The 'Eternal Return': Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27, no. 4 (2002): 947-78.

⁷ Miranda Welby-Everard, "Imaging the Actor: The Theater of Claude Cahun," *Oxford Art Journal* 29, no. 1 (2006): 1-24.

⁸ François Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: l'Exotisme interieur*, (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006), 19.

the French word for curlew. Another temporary pseudonym was Daniel Douglas, an allusion to Oscar Wilde's tragic lover Lord Alfred Douglas. However, it is my argument that Claude Cahun served as the perfect pseudonym because it not only encompassed the androgyny and homosexual identity of the gender-ambiguous first name Claude, the surname Cahun maintains her Jewish identity while subverting the patriarchal name given to her by her father. Cahun is taken from her maternal grandmother Mathilde Cahun, who raised Claude after her mother, Marie-Antoinette Courbebaisse, was committed to an asylum and is shared by her great-uncle Léon Cahun, a world-traveler and Orientalist writer. In the photographs produced in the 1920s and early 30s where Cahun is particularly engaged with issues of identity, Cahun often appears in profile. The stark contrast of her pale skin against what is typically a dark backdrop creates a greater awareness of her silhouette, and as recent scholarship contends, may have meant to accentuate her stereotypically "Jewish" physical traits.⁹

Although I aim to consider issues of Jewish identity in Cahun's work, I wish also to relate these ideas to the current, more gender-focused understanding of her work. By examining her photographic self-portraits and her literary works *Heröines* and especially *Aveux non avenues*, I will demonstrate how the issues of gender identity are in conversation with her Jewish identity. Her self-portraits, writings, and photomontages show Cahun questioned the idea of the coherent, cohesive self and whether the roles she played in life and in art came from within or without. My treatment of Cahun's self-portraits will contribute new evidence toward the emerging consensus that Cahun's self-portraits, like the work of many of her Surrealist contemporaries, often serve to dissolve the cohesive Self. In this paper, I will examine the ways Cahun's adoption of a Jewish

⁹ Viviana Gravano's argument supports my contention that this idea would be present in Cahun's mind by referring to Cahun's own text *Aveux non avenues* in which Cahun details her mother's verbal abuse and lamentations over her daughter's lack of a Grecian nose. Viviana Gravano, "Explorations, Simulations: Claude Cahun and Self-Identity," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 16 (2009): 360.

identity impacted her representation in the self-portraits of the 1920s and 1930s. By studying the artist's biography and writings, the history of Jews and anti-Semitism in France, and works by her contemporaries, I will demonstrate that Cahun clearly evokes a Jewish identity and uses this identity to launch a scathing critique of racialist and anti-Semitic discourse, while also referencing the positive associations her Jewish identification held for her individually. The wide range of attitudes toward Jews in France during the prelude to World War II are evoked in Cahun's photographic self-portraits in a similarly wide range of types: the Jew as literary intellectual, as specimen of ethnography and disease, as vampiric parasite. These types manifest in a short time-frame, destabilizing supposedly fixed types. Cahun is all of these and none of these.

CHAPTER 2

A FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

In a self-portrait dated 1928, Claude Cahun appears in profile, facing toward the viewer's right. Even a cursory glance at this self-portrait and a portrait of Cahun's father Maurice Schwob dated 1917 shows obvious similarities between the two photographs (Figures 1-2). In both portraits, the figure is centered before a vague background, and the composition is closely cropped around the figure. The light source falls strongest on the face, cranium, and fingers. Cahun wears an oversized, dark corduroy suit with a white shirt collar peeking out at the neck, and her arms are folded across her chest. A detailed examination reveals Cahun's meticulousness in exactly recreating the image of her father. The vague background, lighting effects, profile pose, and orientation of the figure are as near identical as possible in the medium of photography, with the only slight incongruity appearing in the fit of the corduroy suits. Schwob's suit fits his robust figure while Cahun's suit is so oversized that the viewer loses a sense of the sitter's body as anything but a vertical plane. In fact, in light of the remarkable resemblance between the suits and the difference in fit, it is conceivable that Cahun is wearing her father's suit in this portrait as she not only alternated frequently between women's and men's clothing, but often donned suits and ties belonging to her father.¹⁰ More masculine hairstyles and dress were adopted by many women in Paris during the interwar period in multiple forms, in a continuum that ranged the couture garments of Coco Chanel to the cross-dressing that served as a code

¹⁰ "Elle portera les costumes de Maurice and ne cessera de jouer avec l'habit d'homme, autant qu'avec les habits de femmes, les mêlant à d'autres qu'on ne saurait bien déterminer." François Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: L'Exotisme interieur* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006), 82.

identifying lesbian artists like Romaine Brooks to one another.¹¹ Overall, Cahun's cross-dressing corresponds with this inclination toward identifying her own sexual difference, but her choice of this specific corduroy suit for this photograph highlights a desire to recreate the portrait of her father and reveals this self-portrait's significance beyond imaging her sexuality.

Cahun's diligent attention to detail demonstrates her investment in recreating the earlier portrait. By examining the circumstances surrounding the 1928 photograph's fabrication, I hope to elucidate the complex reasons for this evident investment. As stated above the portrait of Schwob dates to 1917, but Cahun's self-portrait is from 1928, the year her father--and last close member of her Jewish literary family--died.¹² It is unclear at what time of year or over how long a period of time Cahun staged this self-portrait, but multiple prints were made and as well as multiple negatives with a similar composition. Cahun has made visible changes in each print. In one we can surmise that in the original negative, Cahun's whole body was in frame (Figure 3). The bust-length print was likely the result of cropping during printing. More importantly, two prints reveal a modification of hairstyle, which demonstrates that there were at least two sittings for this portrait. In one Cahun has less than an inch of hair growth which appears to have been bleached.¹³ In a print from a different negative, Cahun has very recently shaved her head, evidently to make her own appearance resemble Schwob's even more closely. In fact, Cahun, her

¹¹ Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, eds., *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003). This collection of essays treats the idea of the New Woman generally, but individual essays also address the masculine trend in women's fashion and cross-dressing as a lesbian code, particularly in portraiture.

¹² An exhibition catalogue from 1995 *Claude Cahun, Photographe* and several other early publications date this photograph circa 1919, following information provided by François Leperlier's first biography. *Claude Cahun: l'ecart et la métamorphose* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992). This date would not contradict the argument that this self-portrait was a conscious allusion to her father's portrait as it was the year Cahun moved from her hometown of Nantes to Paris. However, François Leperlier's second biography of Cahun was significantly revised and expanded due to his more extensive research. This new biography dates this self-portrait to 1928 but offers no explanation for this change. *Claude Cahun: L'exotisme intérieur* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006).

¹³ In addition to and wearing her hair closely cropped, Cahun was known to bleach her hair or dye it shocking colors, such as metallic silver, gold, or pink. It is unclear from the photograph whether her hair is such a bright color or merely bleached. Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: L'exotisme intérieur*, 169.

father Maurice Schwob, and her uncle Marcel Schwob were noted in their respective intellectual and social circles for their distinctive physical features: shaved heads and curved noses.

Maurice's shaved head is visible in his portrait, and Cahun's uncle Marcel was known to shave his head so closely that it bled.¹⁴ Due to their distinctive family nose, both Claude Cahun and her uncle Marcel Schwob were compared to coastal birds. The poet Francis Jammes described his contemporary Marcel Schwob as having a nose like a seagull's beak.¹⁵ Perhaps this explains why one of Cahun's earliest pseudonyms was Claude Courlis. *Le courlis* is the French name for the curlew, a marine bird with a long, curved beak that lives on the beaches near the Schwobs' home of Nantes.

While much of medieval Christian anti-Semitism arose primarily from religious grounds, anti-Semitism in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe often stemmed from anxieties concerning nationalism and national purity.¹⁶ Because communities of Jews dispersed throughout the world, the Jews in countries like Germany and France were seen as groups existing within, but not of, their host country. German Jew and anti-Semite Walter Rathenau described the German Jews as "not a living part of the people but a strange organism in its body."¹⁷ The Jews in France, too, inhabited their country while retaining a distinct religion, language, and culture.

The ideological unification of France necessitated a reevaluation of its parts. The institution of the French nation-state during the French Revolution was instrumental in

¹⁴ Ibid., 170.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Prejudice and hatred of the Jews by the Church Fathers and Christians from the medieval period to the Enlightenment was primarily grounded in religious anti-Judaism or "Judaeophobia," as opposed to the racial hatred intertwined with Judaeophobia in contemporary anti-Semitism. This religious-based hatred stemmed from a belief that Jews were responsible for Christ's death; however the Jewish religion was seen as the progenitor of Christianity. In this view, Judaism was theologically important, but individual Jews were heretical deniers of Christ. George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 490.

¹⁷ Walther Rathenau, "Höre Israel!" *Die Zukunft* 18 (1897): 454-62.

establishing a cultural identity for France, as opposed to the varied cultures of regions, such as Normandy, Provence, and l'Île de France. Before the French nation-state was created, nearly half the population of France spoke a language other than French. The dissemination of French into rural areas and the *Académie Française*, which is responsible for maintaining the integrity and purity of the language, were crucial to the founding of a national cultural identity. The cultural separation and difference of the Jew was fundamentally threatening to nationalistic ideals. During the governmental upheavals of the nineteenth century, French thinkers were concerned with how to define national character; their decisions would, in turn, determine the place of the Jews within France.

Until the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) was amended with two emancipation decrees in 1790 and 1791, Jews in France did not have equal rights or citizenship. That rights for Jews were not granted by the National Assembly's original declaration demonstrates the fundamental separation of the Jews and the suspicion with which they were viewed by the dominant religion and ethnic group of their host country. The Emancipation afforded Jews more rights but also created another problem. How Jewish, and conversely how French, would one decide to be? One's religion became a matter of choice rather than birth. Jews were no longer segregated into ghettos, but those who wished to could choose to associate primarily with other Jews. Different forms of Judaism that had begun to emerge in the seventeenth century created different levels of visibility for one's Jewish identity, with Reform Jews, Secular Jews, and converted Jews more easily integrating into Christian society. Precisely what made one Jewish grew into contentious debate among Jews and non-Jews alike.¹⁸

¹⁸ For an extensive discussion of this debate, see Michael R. Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation: A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) and Nadia Malinovich, *French and Jewish: Culture and the Politics of Identity in Early Twentieth-Century France*, (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008).

If Jews were no longer defined by their religious practice and a strict, common law code, another means of identification was necessary. According Lisa Moses Leff, it was French Jewish writers who used the conception of Jews as a race rather than a religion beginning in the 1820s in order to strengthen their claims to individual rights and citizenship.¹⁹ Because racial rhetoric was used by the Nazis to such destructive ends, it is difficult to recognize the fact that Jewish writers used racial language to describe the Jews in the 1820s, long prior the anti-Semitic racial language that emerged in the 1880s.²⁰ Although Catholicism was proclaimed to be the prevalent religion of France rather than the state religion, the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity were argued to be founded in Christian teachings, and thinkers on both sides of the political spectrum supported this foundation. Though in general Jewish political writers had been in favor of the 1848 revolution, the professed Christian underpinning of the revolution put non-Christians in apparent opposition to the revolution. For this reason, Jewish publicists began to assert the racial identity of the Jewish people to guard against the perceived threat to their citizenship on the basis of a subversive, even treasonous, religion. Establishing the Jews as a race instead of a group of followers of a particular religion provided a secure place for Jews within French society. The French historian Jules Michelet argued in the 1840s that the French Revolution and the institution of France as a nation-state served as an example for the rest of Europe by peacefully unifying diverse races and ethnicities, such as the descendants of the Gauls and Franks.²¹ In this conception, each race had its particular talents and values that assisted the function of society. According to Leff, "Race-thinking was useful for defining a place for Jews in the nineteenth-century world in which Jews could be part of a larger society without abandoning

¹⁹ Lisa Moses Leff, "Self-Definition and Self-Defense: Jewish Racial Identity in Nineteenth-Century France," *Jewish History* 19, no. 1 (2005): 7-28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²¹ Jules Michelet, *Le Peuple* (Paris: Hachette, 1846), 329-31.

their particular beliefs. These beliefs were portrayed as fundamentally unassailable, not only because they were biologically transmitted--and thus protected by natural right--but also because they were still useful and relevant."²²

Implied by the genetic transmission of Jewishness is a belief in a distinctive Jewish physiognomy. The idea that Jewish people were identifiable based on their facial and bodily features was not new, but a growing racial identity for Jews facilitated the proliferation of such stereotypes in the nineteenth century. The English ethnographer and eugenicist Francis Galton devoted a group of composite photographs to identifying the particularities of the Jewish physiognomy in 1883 at the request of folklorist and Jewish historian Joseph Jacobs.²³ Galton attempted to isolate facial characteristics in English Jewish schoolchildren that spoke to a fundamental Jewish physiognomy intact since the Diaspora. In 1885 Galton published these photographs with an accompanying essay commenting only on his method and hailing the photographs as "the best specimens of composites I have ever produced."²⁴ The absence of a conclusion and the use of the word *specimen* demonstrate Galton's belief in his method's objectivity. Jacobs' responsibility was to pass judgment on the composites' faithfulness to the supposed actual Jewish type. He saw in them "the nearest representation of...the youthful David when he tended his father's sheep."²⁵

²² "Self-Definition and Self-Defense," 21.

²³ Francis Galton, *The Jewish Type*, 1883. In Karl Pearson, *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), 2:293, Plate XXXV. Despite both Galton and Joseph Jacobs being educated in statistics, their method includes some obvious statistical problems. They chose neither a representative nor a random sample, meaning their results could hardly be extended to the entire population of Jewish people in England. Additionally, the subjects were chosen and arranged in order to heighten any correspondences between them. The portions of the composites in sharper focus are understood to represent shared characteristics, whereas the blurred areas--typically at the periphery--are assumed to be both of lesser importance and of lesser correspondence. For a more exhaustive discussion of the problematic use of photographs as fact to identify races and individuals, see Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3-64.

²⁴ Francis Galton, "Photographic Composites," *The Photographic News* 29, no. 1389 (April 17, 1885): 243-45.

²⁵ Jacobs, "The Jewish Type, and Galton's Composite Photographs," *The Photographic News* 19, no. 1390 (April 24, 1885).

Though Galton does not explicitly call attention to his subjects' noses in his text, the nose was one of the primary features assessed in the anthropometrics of the races, and Jews especially. In his book *The Jew's Body*, Jewish history scholar Sander Gilman allocates an entire chapter to the concept of a "Jewish nose." In this chapter, Gilman puts forth the argument that the marked physical difference of Jews from the prevailing Caucasian ethnic groups in England, Germany, and France was an entirely constructed difference. Though the "Jewish nose" was a supposedly objectively identifiable trait, surgical intervention in the form of rhinoplasty did not erase a nose's Jewishness despite a marked change in appearance. Because it was constructed as an essential difference, something of the Jewish character was believed still to remain in the nose and betray its bearer as a Jew.²⁶ By allowing Jewish people to live outside ghettos and become involved in society at large, Emancipation made it newly imperative for Christians suspicious of Jews to be able to identify the ones they might encounter. Though they had previously been identified with people of African descent, from the shape of the nose to skin color, assimilated Jews in Germany, Austria, and the United States during the nineteenth century became ever fairer with each successive generation.²⁷ Because skin color was no longer the primary physical marker of Jewishness, what remained was the "Jewish nose," described as "very convex...like a bow, throughout the whole length from the eyes to the tip. It is thin and sharp."²⁸ Although one would expect the intermarriage of Jews and non-Jews to temper the distinctive Jewish physiognomy in their children, the evidence of Jewish blood was deemed stronger in the half-Jewish children, like Claude Cahun. Joseph Jacobs remarked that Jewish heritage "tends to

²⁶ Sander Gilman, "The Jewish Nose: Are Jews White? Or, the History of the Nose Job," in *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 169-93.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 177-79.

²⁸ Eden Warwick, *Notes on Noses* (1848; repr., London: Richard Bentley, 1852), 89-90. The author acknowledges the fact that the "Jewish nose" is not found exclusively among Jews but goes on to remark that it is a "good money-getting Nose, a good commercial Nose."

appear in a marked and intensely Jewish cast of features and expression..." in such individuals.²⁹ One could convert to Christianity, live among and marry non-Jews, and have children with non-Jews, but one's Jewish character was unalterable and permanently visible.

Whitney Chadwick has argued that Cahun's 1928 self-portrait recalls an existing photographic typology for portraits of French Jewish authors in the nineteenth century.³⁰ Unfortunately she does not cite examples to support this contention. However, the profile pose was often used by ethnographers like Galton to display the ideal (stereotypical) physiognomy of races and ethnicities. When considered in the relevant contexts, Cahun's use of the typology of Jews and the racial stereotypes calls to mind not only her Jewish family, but also the social status of Jews in France. Though Cahun was loath to essentialize or categorize herself and often used the trappings of these categories in a parodic manner, the occasion for this self-portrait's creation--her father's death--demanded gravity. Because the dates of Cahun's photographs are only ever as specific as a singular year, it is difficult to ascertain whether the version of this self-portrait with fully shaved head preceded the version with very short, dyed hair. If her self-portrait with shaved head came first, it is likely that Cahun revisited this composition after some weeks. If the portrait with Cahun's head shaved instead came second, that would suggest that Cahun modified her hairstyle to evoke more explicitly the image of her father and solidify her Jewish identity through him. In either case, reworking the tribute portrait expresses the idea that the tradition and family lineage invoked were significant for Cahun in affirming her Jewish identity. Although many of Cahun's self-portraits parody other types and categories to the point of absurdity, her self-portraits that I argue are concerned with Jewishness evince a more

²⁹ Joseph Jacobs, *Studies in Jewish Statistics: Social, Vital, and Anthropometric* (London: D. Nutt, 1891), xxiii.

³⁰ Whitney Chadwick, "Claude Cahun and Lee Miller: Problematizing the Surrealist Territories of Gender and Ethnicity," In *Gender Nonconformity, Race, and Sexuality: Charting the Connections*, ed. Toni P. Lester (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 152-54.

conflicted relationship with their type. Whereas Cahun's portrait in the manner of her father conveys a sentimental, familial attachment to her Jewish identity, the self-portraits I will analyze in the subsequent sections display a wariness toward her ethnicity. These sections will show Cahun's discomfort with the type as it constricts individuality and offers the dominant culture a symbol on which to project its anxieties.

CHAPTER 3

UNDER OBSERVATION

One particular self-portrait contains an explicit reference to Cahun's Jewish identity, making the absence of discussions of her Jewish identity in the scholarship all the more remarkable. In an untitled self-portrait dated circa 1926 (Figure 4), Cahun is shown from the waist up, her body at a sixty-degree angle away from the camera, with arms crossed, but she turns her head to gaze at the viewer from beneath a glass dome that covers her head and extends just below her shoulders. Even without the visual distraction of the glass dome's reflections, her face competes for the viewer's attention with a woven or beaded star, which hangs from her neck and is nearly as large as her face. This competitive tension is compounded by a short depth of field that puts only Cahun's eyes and the star's farthest corners in fine focus. The star's edges are comprised of layers of colors, which the photosensitive silver translates into values. The outermost row reads as black--the same value as Cahun's clothing, and several layers closer to the center appears nearly white. A broken angle in the variously-valued rows betrays a sixth point, probably concealed by the black drape Cahun holds against her body. The shape's wide angles are also consistent with a six-pointed star. One cannot help but complete the star by providing a sixth point in one's mental image. The struggle between the actual polygon in the photograph and one's mental image of a six-pointed star gives the symbol prominence in the photograph. The star has significant visual and thematic weight. Cahun and the star of David hanging from her neck become the image's two centerpoints.

A star of David would seem to be an explicit symbol of Jewish identity; however, the existing scholarly interpretation of this self-portrait is focused yet again on Cahun's sexuality. In *Women Together/Women Apart*, Tirza Latimer glosses over the clear sign for Jewishness, favoring instead a discussion of what she identifies as emergent constructions of lesbian subjectivity. This reading rearticulates all Cahun's self-portraits as relations between the subject Claude Cahun and the camera-operator/photographer Marcel Moore. Latimer connects the recurrent doubling in these photographs to the myth of Narcissus, its homosexual connotations, and thus a statement of homosexual subjectivity. If there is no literal doubling in a Claude Cahun photograph, doubling is engaged by Cahun's visual address of the viewer and the presence of her partner behind the camera.³¹ Latimer relegates the star of David in this self-portrait to the minor role of visual pun that designates Cahun as the "star" of the photograph for Marcel Moore.³² Latimer's acknowledgment of it as a potential symbol of Jewish identity comes in a footnote in the form of a somewhat literal metaphor that Cahun's Jewish identity, like the star, is "partially eclipsed" by what Latimer assumes is a dearth of Jewish content in Cahun's oeuvre³³ I find this reading to be almost willfully blind because it leaves unexplored the star of David, the photograph's relationship to a series of other self-portraits, and the dome on Cahun's head which only becomes more bizarre without the series' context. With this content acknowledged, it becomes clear that the categorization of the self is at issue in this photograph, and the primary category for examination is her Jewish ethnicity. By embracing this photograph's social and art historical context, I will demonstrate that Cahun's more well-recognized inquiry into the

³¹Tirza True Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 88-105.

³² *Ibid.*, 103.

³³ *Ibid.*, 174n99.

concatenate limitations of descriptors, like "lesbian" and "woman," included the ethnic category of "Jewish."

Although stars of David are often worn as necklaces by Jews as a symbol of their religion and identity in a manner analogous to Christian crosses or crucifixes, the star of David worn in this self-portrait does not resemble such a necklace so much as a badge. In the minds of twenty-first century viewers, a badge in the shape of a star of David must evoke images of yellow star of David badges marked "*Juif*" worn by Jews in Nazi ghettos and concentration camps. This self-portrait's 1926 date makes this specific allusion impossible. However, the star of David had long been a symbol of Jewish identity and had previously been worn as symbol of Jewishness in a number of European communities. There is no direct biblical link between the Jewish religion or identity and the hexagram, but the six-pointed star was commonly associated with legends of the Seal of Solomon and the Shield of David by Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Again, there is little biblical evidence as to the actual symbols used by Solomon or David, but like the hexagram, these symbols were believed to be apotropaic and able to call upon divine influence. Thus, the hexagram and these symbols were logically associated with one another by the mid-fourteenth century, with the shield of David and the pentagram most frequently connected.³⁴ After the Lateran Council of 1215, sumptuary laws commonly required Jews living in many Christian societies to wear a badge identifying them as Jews when in public. The badges were typically worn on the shoulders or chest, and while the shape these badges took varied, the prevalent form became the star of David by the seventeenth century beginning in Prague and lasting until the laws were eliminated during the Enlightenment.³⁵ Joaneath Spicer argues that the laws requiring Jews to wear badges identifying them as Jews was appropriated from those worn voluntarily by

³⁴ Joaneath Spicer, "The Star of David and Jewish Culture in Prague around 1600, Reflected in Drawings of Roelandt Savery and Paulus van Vianen," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 54 (1996): 208-10.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 209, 212-14.

Jews at meetings of the Zionist movement in Central Europe during the 1890s.³⁶ Even though Cahun may not have known the intricacies of the Magen David's history and symbolism, the status of the star of David as a Jewish symbol would have been manifest from its frequent use on the exteriors of synagogues. By the 1920s, the hexagram was readily identifiable with Judaism and Jewish identity. An artist as attuned to the signs of categories of identity surely would not have made reference to Jewish identity unintentionally, especially in the context of Europe's rising current of anti-Semitism. Willfully ignoring her Jewish heritage and the signs for Jewishness is a luxury Cahun could not afford.

The star of David clearly designates Claude Cahun as a Jew in this self-portrait. But what of the glass dome? As I alluded above, this photograph is one of a series of photographs that feature Cahun's head under a glass dome. Four of these are grouped together in a series entitled *Studies for a Keepsake* (Figure 5).³⁷ In these self-portraits, Cahun's head is again under glass, but the staging and the cropping of these photographs are such that Cahun appears to be a disembodied or severed yet living head preserved in a vitrine. The prints are cropped so tightly around the glass dome that one cannot gain a sense of Cahun's surroundings. The only clues are the reflections onto the glass from an intense, apparently natural light source behind the camera. Cahun actively examines her surroundings from within the glass. Her access to them is purely visual, as the glass cuts off these surroundings from her other senses. In the three leftmost photographs, her gaze is intent, inquiring, and focused on the viewer who visually inquires her, as well. The effect is disconcerting, as though a specimen has become self-aware and resents the one-way trajectory of the gaze.

³⁶ Ibid., 209.

³⁷ The use of English in this title is Cahun's own.

Generally speaking, the glass casing and elevated base used in these photographs is reminiscent of a bell jar or specimen case, which would denote its contents as an object worthy of observation, description, and analysis. More specifically, similar glass containers were used to protect specimens and models in anatomical museums both popular and medical. The images of Cahun's head in a glass container bear a startling resemblance to medical models used to illustrate varied diseases and afflictions, for example, a wax face exhibiting skin symptoms of tertiary syphilis (Figure 6). Beginning in the seventeenth century and continuing into the early twentieth century, wax constructions of diseased faces were encased in glass for study by medical students in anatomical museums connected to medical schools. However, during the nineteenth century, such anatomical models were increasingly seen by the public in both Europe and the United States in popular science museums and sometimes side shows.³⁸ According to Sappol, medical anatomical museums tended to have fewer models and more specimens, and their purpose was scientific and pedagogical.³⁹ By contrast, a moralistic tone pervaded popular anatomical museums. Wax models displayed grotesque skin maladies and sexually transmitted disease, such as the syphilitic's face mentioned above. These museums titillated with sexualized, nude wax models, juxtaposing their sensuality with the terrible venereal diseases seen as the result of sexual immodesty.⁴⁰

The moral didactics of popular anatomical museums were not limited to the consequences of sexual activity. These museums often combined anatomical science with the

³⁸ For discussion of these popular science museums and their moralizing elements, consult Christiane Py and Cécile Vidart, "Les musées d'anatomie sur les champs de foire," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 60, no. 60 (1985): 3-10; Carin Berkowitz, "The Beauty of Anatomy: Visual Displays and Surgical Education in Early Nineteenth-Century London," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 85, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 248-78; Maritha Rene Burmeister, "Popular Anatomical Museums in Nineteenth-Century England," (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2000); Michael Sappol, "Morbid Curiosity: The Decline and Fall of the Popular Anatomical Museum," in "A Cabinet of Curiosities," special issue, *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life* 4, no. 2 (2004), <http://www.common-place.org/vol-04/no-02/sappol/> (accessed October 3, 2012).

³⁹ Sappol, "Morbid Curiosities," under "Professional versus Popular."

⁴⁰ Sappol, under "Down by Law"; Py and Vidart, "Les musées d'anatomie," 4-9.

growing science of ethnography to bolster claims of the Caucasian race's innate superiority and debate whether the races constituted multiples species.⁴¹ In France, entertainment was privileged above the pedagogical in popular anatomical museums. In fact, many of them were housed in temporary buildings and attached to circuses and fairs.⁴² This ensured the information was easily accessible to a wide public, if not accurate. Directors of such museums often adopted the title of "Professor" or "Doctor" without appropriate credentials, lending their claims a false scientific air. The exhibitions often traded in orientalist notions of their colonial subjects. An exhibition presented by a "doctor" from Groningen included the body of the "Hottentot Venus," mirroring the pervasive assumption that African women possessed a corrupt hypersexuality, the evidence of which was to be found in the shape of her body.⁴³ As Sappol has argued, "Part of the museum's appeal was that the anatomical specimen was a mirror. People saw themselves in the objects, and they saw double: the museum was a carnival of self and other."⁴⁴ The museum foregrounded difference, whether sexual or ethnic, and thereby assured the visitor of the wholeness and correctness of his or her own body.

A similar motif was rehearsed in French ethnographic museums and the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris* of 1931. Both sought to glorify France and its colonial project of incorporating the world's diverse races into an imperial France while sustaining the codes of racial difference, and press responses followed suit.⁴⁵ Photographs of people from the various French colonies appeared in the magazine *Vu* with a contest for the readers to identify the race of

⁴¹The interactions of ethnography and anatomical studies in Victorian England are discussed at length in Burmeister, "Disseminating the Modern Medical Body: Ethnology, Embryology, and the Medical Gaze," in "Popular Anatomical Museums in Nineteenth-Century England," (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2000), 128-78; Py and Vidart explore this issue's iteration in France "Les musées d'anatomie," 5-9.

⁴² Py and Vidart, 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁴ Sappol, "Morbid Curiosities," under "Decline and Fall."

⁴⁵ Janine Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 40 (Autumn 2001): 239-55.

those photographed and rank the races for their respective beauty.⁴⁶ The Surrealists were so dissatisfied with this narrative that, in association with the French Communist, they mounted their own exhibition and expressed their opposition in no uncertain terms. Paul Éluard, Louis Aragon, and Yves Tanguy titled their 1931 exhibition *l'Exposition Anti-impérialiste: La Vérité sur les colonies* and published two photographs of the objects in the journal *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*.⁴⁷ Within the exhibition a banner hung above the objects reading: "'Un peuple qui opprime d'autres ne-saurait être libre.' Karl Marx." Sculptures and ritual objects from the colonies' religions appeared alongside those of Christianity in a display under the heading "*Fétiches Européens*," playing on the European fetish for the exotic and the perceived superiority of Caucasians and Christianity.⁴⁸

Although this exhibition attracted little public attention, a similar exhibition five years later gained a wider audience. "*L'Exposition Surréaliste d'objets*" was open for just a week in May, but it was attended by Paris' artistic elite, including Picasso and Man Ray.⁴⁹ In this case, the didactic texts were absent from the exhibition space, but a special "Objects" issue of *Cahiers d'art* was published as a companion to the exhibition. In 1932, Cahun began associating with the Surrealist circle. She not only participated in this second anti-colonial exhibition but also published "*Prenez garde aux objets domestiques*" in the *Cahiers d'art* special issue.⁵⁰ In this short essay, Cahun ruminates on the marvelous in the everyday and the illogic of the feminine category. Though this excerpt is not specifically concerned with the colonial or the ethnographic, it was occasioned by an exhibition of what Mileaf has called "corporeal provocations that result

⁴⁶ "Les Français de couleur," *Vu* (June 3, 1931).

⁴⁷ "A *l'Exposition La Vérité sur les colonies, 8 avenue Mathurin-Moreau (Salle organisée par Aragon, Éluard, et Tanguy)*," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* 4 (December 1931): 40.

⁴⁸ Mileaf, "Body to Politics," 247.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 249 n. 41. Picasso, Man Ray, and others signed the Galerie Charles Ratton's guestbook, which is now in the Galerie's manuscript archives.

⁵⁰ Claude Cahun, "*Prenez garde aux objets domestiques*," in "*Objets*" special issue, *Cahiers d'art* 11, no. 2 (1936).

in ongoing challenges to the status quo."⁵¹ When *Studies for a Keepsake* and the untitled self-portrait with Jewish star were made circa 1926, Cahun had not yet begun to associate with the official Surrealist group and anti-imperialist or anti-fascist groups, such as *l'Association des Artistes et Écrivains Revolutionnaires* and *Contre-Attaque*. However, she had encountered Breton's circle through *Le Journal Littéraire*, which published an excerpt from Cahun's early manuscript *Éphémérides* in 1925 and two sections of *Heröines* in 1926. *Le Journal Littéraire* had previously accepted writing from Robert Desnos, André Breton, and Louis Aragon until their anti-colonial politics resulted in a heated disagreement with the editor Paul Lévy that nearly culminated in a fistfight between Lévy and Aragon.⁵² Cahun's interest in politics and bleeding the contours of categories was only solidified in the presence of like minds, such as Breton and Henri Michaux, and under the specter of Nazi Germany's growing political threat.

The roughly contemporary inquiry into the presentation of ethnographic objects in museums, galleries, and popular displays merges with Cahun's own questioning of race in the *Keepsakes* series and its star of David outlier. As I have tried to show, the appearance of Cahun's head beneath a glass casing is reminiscent of the anatomical models of human heads in glass jars, which were used for both medical study and popular titillation. In colonialist exhibitions and ethnographic museums, an object belonging to a particular ethnicity--sometimes a member of that ethnicity, as well--was put on display in order to call attention to the ethnicity's perceived inferiority in relation to the Western European. In *Studies for a Keepsake*, Cahun offers an indictment of these structures that is made all the more effective by their repetition and Cahun's visual address of the viewer. These photographs play on contemporary associations of glass cases with museums and their colonialist, racist narrative. As a living museum object, Cahun's

⁵¹ Mileaf, 254.

⁵² François Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: l'Exotisme interieur*, (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006), 72.

unsettling gaze makes her viewer into a voyeur. While the untitled self-portrait with star of David has helped me contextualize *Studies for a Keepsake* within a colonial discourse on race, it may be a less successful denunciation of the discourse. The star of David makes explicit Cahun's anxiety over a colonialist discourse that nominally incorporates the ethnic groups of the colonies into the French nation while maintaining that those ethnic groups are essentially different and lesser, a position her photograph makes clear is suggestive of French attitudes toward the Jews during Assimilation.

CHAPTER 4

"N'AYEZ PAS PEUR D'ÊTRE DÉVORÉS"

In 1928, Claude Cahun twice turns to the question of Jewish identity in a photographic self-portrait (Figure 7). In the following section, I will identify the well-known tropes of both the stereotypical Jew and the vampire used to stage herself as a monstrous Other in this self-portrait. Cahun's 1928 "horrific" self-portrait is also used in two works, first as part of a composite photograph titled *Que me veux-tu?* (Figure 8), and later singled out in a photomontage published in her semi-autobiographical book *Aveux non avenues*.⁵³ In this self-portrait, Cahun stands with her back to the viewer and her neck contorted sharply to throw her head over her left shoulder. Her lips are tightly closed, and she directs her gaze downward. The profile view draws attention to her angular jaw and pointed ear, her convex nose, and baldness. Her pale skin contrasts sharply against the shallow, dark background and her dark sleeveless top. Dark makeup on her eyes and lips further exaggerates her pallor. The accumulation of posture, pallor, physiognomy, and an uncertain setting produces an intensely disquieting image.

Cahun rarely used makeup in her self-portraits. While there are several photographs of Cahun with makeup, it is evident that such examples were nearly always part of a series of cast photographs for theater performances, such as *Barbe Bleue*.⁵⁴ Costumes for these avant-garde theater productions typically involved elaborate makeup that distorted the actors' features and

⁵³ Prints made from the primary photograph discussed in this section are also found in numerous museums and private collections, but the second photograph that comprises *Que me veux-tu?* does not. One can attribute this to either Cahun's or her collectors' preferences.

⁵⁴ One exception is *I Am in Training; Don't Kiss Me*. Though this photograph is not connected to a theater production, the obvious artifice and exaggerated makeup is reminiscent of makeup worn by clowns or the characters in the plays Cahun performed in. This style of makeup differs considerably from that of the Vampire Jew image discussed in this section.

subverted the expectation of realism. In more traditional theater, makeup is used to make actors' features legible to their audience. The same was also true of early cinema. Despite the proximity of the camera to its subject, the primitive cameras and fast exposure time required a high level of contrast to capture the subject well. Makeup was used to achieve the high level of contrast necessary to make facial features distinct. The use of makeup in Cahun's "horrific" self-portrait is particularly significant when compared with its pair in the composite photograph *Que me veux-tu?*. In the second photograph of the pair, Cahun's features are somewhat softened by a three-quarters profile, lack of makeup, and slightly relaxed mouth. Her aquiline nose appears straighter, her lips fuller, and her eyes gentler. In the composite photograph, the two negatives have been printed at opposing angles, such that the gentler Cahun seems to retreat from the advancing predatory Cahun. *Que me veux-tu?* was reproduced as the book jacket for Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes' 1929 novel *Frontières Humaines* (Figure 9).⁵⁵ The inscription below the image reads "N'ayez pas peur d'être dévorés," or "Do not fear being devoured."⁵⁶ This inscription suggests that Ribemont-Dessaignes recognized the predatory, vampiric tone of the composite photograph that I will claim by examining the photograph's allusions to contemporary cinema and anti-Semitic tropes.

Cahun's exceptional use of makeup in this particular photograph and its associations with film are not mere coincidence. There is a striking resemblance between this photograph of Cahun and contemporary images of the vampire in film, particularly F. W. Murnau's Count Orlok in *Nosferatu* (Figure 10). Cahun's biographer François Leperlier states that she was interested in contemporary film and lists F. W. Murnau's *Sunrise* (1926) and *Nosferatu* (1922) among her

⁵⁵ Ribemont-Dessaignes was also the editor of the literary journal *Bifur* which published his novel. Unfortunately, library copies do not have this book jacket. A reproduction of this book jacket can be found in Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: L'exotisme interieur* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006), plate 15. An anamorphic portrait of Cahun similarly titled *Frontière Humaine* was published in *Bifur* 5 (April 1930).

⁵⁶ Leperlier, plate 15.

favorite films.⁵⁷ *Nosferatu* was originally released in Paris in November 1922, well before Cahun made the photographs in discussion, but importantly, had a second Parisian showing February 24, 1928.⁵⁸ Like Cahun in the above image, in *Nosferatu* Count Orlok is frequently shown in profile, drawing attention to his hooked nose, pointed ears, and sharply pointed jaw. When Orlok removes his hat, he also exposes his bald skull. Orlok is extremely pale and thin. Dark makeup covers his upper and lower eyelids, giving his eyes a sunken appearance and accentuating his pallid skin. Not only do Cahun and Orlok share these physical traits, these features are distinguishing characteristics of both the vampire and the stereotypical Jew.⁵⁹

The anti-Semitic mythology of the Jews and the mythology of the vampire developed concurrently and, as Jeffrey Weinstock argues, symbiotically.⁶⁰ Although vampires are not overtly designated as Jewish in vampire folklore and literature, the correlation between the two becomes impossible to ignore when considered in any depth. In her article "The Biology of Blood-Lust," medieval historian Brenda Gardenour details the medieval distortions of Aristotelian natural philosophy at the service of medicine and Christian theology and demonstrates their implications for conceptions of Jewish physiology.⁶¹ In medieval Christian theology, the male Christian body was imagined as perfect, and as Aristotelian theory necessitated its opposite, the female body was conceived as imperfect and impure. The male body was thought to be warm and dry, its innate heat enabling efficient digestion and the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁸ Jean Paul Goergen, "Nosferatu-Aufführungsdaten," *Filmblatt* 7, no. 18 (2002).

⁵⁹ Though I am not the first to point out the resemblance between this photograph of Claude Cahun and the image of Count Orlok in *Nosferatu*, inadequate attention has been paid to this important correspondence. Laura "Lou" Bailey and Lizzie Thynne mention it in their article "Beyond Representation: Claude Cahun's Monstrous Mischief-Making," but the two authors make this comparison only to argue instead that Cahun was promoting a "cult of monstrous beauty," opposed to the Surrealist ideal of convulsive beauty. *History of Photography* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 135-48.

⁶⁰ Jeffrey Weinstock, "Circumcising Dracula: The Vampire as Anti-Semitic Trope," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 12, no. 1 (2001): 92.

⁶¹ Brenda Gardenour, "The Biology of Blood-Lust: Medieval Medicine, Theology, and the Vampire Jew" *Film & History* 41, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 51-63.

conversion of excess humoral blood into muscle, hair, and sperm. By contrast, "the corrupt female body [...] was cold and unnaturally moist. Because of its lack of heat, the female body was unable to digest its food completely and could not burn off excess humoral blood; instead, this blood was stored in the uterus, where it became corrupt and toxic, whence it needed to be expelled once a month."⁶² The perfection of the Christian male body was absolute, and defined all others as its opposite. Therefore the male Jew was considered effeminate and likened to the corrupt female body, and an ideal host for evil. The comparison of the Jewish male body to the female body went so far as to give rise to the malicious legend of Jewish male menstruation.⁶³ Due to the lack of body heat, both the vampire and the Jew were thought to be cold in humor, which produced pale skin, hairlessness, and a desire for body fluids like blood and semen to balance their humors. Jews were also described by a melancholic temperament resulting from an excess of black bile. The symptoms of melancholia were similar and included pallor, bodily dryness and coldness, insufficient digestion, strange food cravings, a desire for isolation, ravenous sexual appetite, and an obsession with death.⁶⁴ The outward similarities between the myth of the vampire and the anti-Semitic vision of Jews are plain. As cold-humored, feminized hosts for evil, both sought blood to warm their bodies.

Here the vampire myth abuts the belief that Jews killed Christian children and engaged in blood rituals. This persistent myth began as early as the twelfth century when the death of Julian of Norwich was blamed on local Jews. It was argued that Jews had committed the murder to mock Christians and the death of Jesus Christ because the child's body was found on Maundy Thursday.⁶⁵ Though charges against the Jews of Norwich were dropped, many similar cases

⁶² Gardenour, 54.

⁶³ Ibid., 58.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 58-60.

⁶⁵ Weinstock, 92-3.

occurred thenceforth. Rabbis were believed to have incited such violence, and images of rabbis draining the blood of a young child into chalice and drinking that blood circulated in the aftermath of the purported ritual murders of Christian children.⁶⁶ Jews were accused of Host desecration, which involved mocking and torturing the transubstantiated Christ in the form of the Eucharist and confirmed them as evil heretics allied with the Devil. As Prager and Telushkin put it, "Who but the people of the Devil recognize the divinity of Jesus but wish to destroy him?"⁶⁷ In Savoy in the 1320s, Christians believed that the Passover food charoset was made of the pummeled entrails of murdered Christian children. The belief that matzo and the wine used on Passover contained Christian blood was even more widespread.⁶⁸ Beyond the murders of individuals supposedly committed by Jews, Jews were notorious in the minds of Christians as the cause of Black Plague in the fourteenth century, although Jews also suffered and died from the disease. During the height of the epidemic beginning in 1347, thousands of European Jews were slaughtered for their alleged role in purposely spreading the plague.⁶⁹ Eventually the Jews were absolved of any blame for the Black Plague, but another epidemic took its place: syphilis. In Oskar Panizza's 1894 play *The Council of Love*, it is no less than the Devil who recruits that famous Jewish seductress Salome to spread syphilis among Christian men. Gilman reads Panizza's Devil as Jewish as well, citing yellow skin, illness, and "degeneracy."⁷⁰ However, the Devil's limp is most telling. It connotes both the Devil's Jewishness and his diseased state, as a

⁶⁶ Gardenour, 60.

⁶⁷ Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews?: The Reason for Antisemitism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 103.

⁶⁸ Weinstock., 94.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷⁰ Sander Gilman, "Salome, Syphilis, Sarah Bernhardt, and the Modern Jewess," in *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity* ed. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 103-4. Panizza had been a psychiatrist before he became a writer, so it is not surprising that *The Council of Love* and *The Operated Jew* published the previous year connect disease and pseudo-medical science to anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews.

distinctive limp was identified in 1896 as a symptom of neurosyphilis.⁷¹ The idea of Jews as transmitters of plague or *the* Plague still had currency in the late nineteenth century, and as I will demonstrate in later in this paper, the association of Jews with plague reappears in the twentieth century.

Through its reference to the contemporary film *Nosferatu*, the "horrific" image of Claude Cahun channels the multiple associations of Jews with the vampire myth. In addition to the generally anti-Semitic subtext of the vampire myth, *Nosferatu* is peculiarly replete with overt comparisons of vampires to the stereotypical Jew from beginning to end. The first inter-title card announces that the following events are "A Chronicle of the Great Death in Wisborg *anno domini* 1838."⁷² A later inter-title displaying an excerpt from a book entitled *Of Vampires, Terrible Ghosts, Magic and the Seven Deadly Sins* declares "Out of Belial's seed appeared the Vampire Nosferatu who lives and feeds off Human Blood [sic]. He lives in terrifying caves, tombs and coffins. These are filled with the goddamned soil from the fields of the Black Death."⁷³ Like the Jew, the vampire is associated with both the Plague and collusion with the Devil. After introducing the protagonist Hutter and his wife Ellen, the unnamed narrator presents Hutter's employer Knock. In Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* this character is explicitly Jewish, being described as "a Hebrew of the rather Adelphi type, with a nose like a sheep, and a fez." Though Knock is not named as a Jew, the viewer of *Nosferatu* would likely have recognized signs of Jewishness in him. He was a real estate agent about whom little was known, only that "he paid his people well," and therefore the narrator has included several layers of Jewish

⁷¹ Ibid., 104-5.

⁷² The name "Wisborg" was apparently used mistakenly by the screenwriter Henrik Galeen to refer to the city of Visby in Sweden. Visborg is that city's fortress complex. According to Patrick Colm Hogan, Visby had a large population of German expatriates, and the reference to Visby was probably an appeal to the nationalism of German audiences. Patrick Colm Hogan, "Narrative Universals, Nationalism, and Sacrificial Terror: From *Nosferatu* to Nazism," *Film Studies* 8 (Summer 2006): 93-105.

⁷³ Inter-title, *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horrors*, Netflix, 81 minutes, directed by F. W. Murnau, <http://movies.netflix.com/WiPlayer?movieid=812752&trkid=496682&t=Nosferatu> (accessed September 23, 2012).

stereotypes in the information contained in a few inter-title cards. The stereotype of the greedy Jew is well-known, even today. In the nineteenth century, capitalism and Jews were identified with one another as readily as socialism was associated with the working class.⁷⁴ Ken Gelder identified this stereotype in the writings of Karl Marx, specifically *Capital* and the essay "On the Jewish Question." Gelder argues that Marx' description of capital as a vampiric scourge that "lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks" interacts with Marx' opinion of the Jews and their connection to capital. In Marx's essay, the Jew worshipped capital and saw every social interaction in the terms of economic exchange. Both vampirism and the Jew are connected through the intermediary of capital.⁷⁵ The linkage of vampires and Jews through capital is true of both Count Orlok and Knock, who entice the naive German Hutter to bring death and affliction to his town with the promise of wealth.

Knock and Count Orlok are further designated as Jewish through their secretiveness. In the above referenced inter-title card, the narrator states that Knock is the subject of "many rumors," and "Only one thing was certain; he paid his people well." Like the typological Jew, Knock is secretive and deceptive. Gilman argues extensively that a source of the notion of the secretive, deceptive Jew is a reactionary response to the Jew's "hidden language" and the Jewish voice, which was perceived to be different from all other ethnic groups yet universal among Jews.⁷⁶ Knock and Count Orlok communicate by way of a similarly hidden language. In two separate scenes, Knock and Orlok read parchments covered with largely unknown characters, but symbols such as the star of David and a few Hebrew letters have been identified.⁷⁷ In addition to

⁷⁴ Erin G. Carlston, *Thinking Fascism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 33.

⁷⁵ Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 18-22.

⁷⁶ Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, 2-3, 10-37.

⁷⁷ M. Bouvier and J.-L. Leutrat, *Nosferatu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 306.

the conspiratorial associations of a secret language, this strange writing combines with other racial stereotypes of Jews to suggest the Jewishness of these two characters.

However corrupt Knock's business dealings with the vampire Count Orlok may be, he does not appear to be a vampire himself. Both share similar physiognomy, including hunched shoulders, pallid skin, bald head, and large pointed ears, but the plague does not begin to afflict and destroy Visby until Orlok arrives along with several coffins filled with rats and "the goddamned soil from the fields of the Black Death."⁷⁸ Rats, the soil, and the (Jewish) vampire are all associated with bringing about the Black Plague. Orlok's voyage from Transylvania to Visby creates a swath of destruction in its wake. Every crew member of the ship carrying Orlok and his coffins either becomes deliriously, fatally ill or jumps ship to avoid a similar fate. Newspapers report an outbreak of plague in port cities near Transylvania on the Black Sea. Each plague victim has identical neck scars. Orlok's arrival in Visby is also followed by numerous deaths. When the townspeople learn the vampire is the cause of this plague and that "Nobody can save you unless a sinless maiden makes the Vampire forget the first crow of the cock--if she was to give him her blood willingly," Hutter's wife Ellen decides to give her life for the communal good. As Hogan rightly states, Ellen is a Christ figure whose sense of duty and flawless morality compel her to make this sacrifice.⁷⁹ More important for this study, Ellen's death at the hands of a vampire who embodies many anti-Semitic tropes of Jewishness evokes the anti-Semitic mythology that Jews killed Christ.

In returning to Cahun's vampiric self-portrait, one can now see the Jewish stereotypes illuminated through her allusion to the famous vampire in the film *Nosferatu*. Both the vampire and the Jew are conceived as spreaders of disease, agents of evil, and parasites, whether

⁷⁸ Inter-title, *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horrors*, Netflix, 81 minutes, directed by F. W. Murnau, <http://movies.netflix.com/WiPlayer?movieid=812752&trkid=496682&t=Nosferatu> (accessed September 23, 2012).

⁷⁹ Hogan, "Narrative Universals," 101.

metaphorical or literal. Their similar place in society as mythical scapegoat is mirrored in the similar physical features they were believed to possess. Cahun uses these stereotypes and the cultural currency they would have held after *Nosferatu's* second release in Paris in 1928 to image herself as a dehumanized, stereotypical Jew. Though previous readings have interpreted a purely sexual content of this vampiric self-portrait, a hypertrophic, "monstrous" sexuality was a stereotype of both Jews and homosexuals.⁸⁰ My interpretation of this self-portrait is not an attempt to disprove these existing readings. Rather, my intention is that, by exploring the multiple types of Others Cahun uses in her self-portraits, scholars will gain a more complete picture of her oeuvre and the stereotypes she questioned. Her self-portraits do not fully reject categories of difference, like sexual or ethnic Other. Instead she uses them to show the place she was perceived to occupy in society. These stereotypes offer a method for representing these categories of identity while questioning their validity. In *Que me-veux tu?*, The unmarked, "neutral" Cahun confronts her "horrific" self and recoils in fear. Though the doubling evokes the understanding of homosexuality as self-desire, the positions of the figures and the title itself, which is literally a question, places the two figures in opposition to each other. In contrasting her vampiric figure with her softer figure in, Cahun casts doubt on the immutability of the essential qualities of her Jewishness.

⁸⁰ Laura "Lou" Bailey and Lizzie Thynne, "Beyond Representation: Claude Cahun's Monstrous Mischief-Making," *History of Photography* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 141-48; Tirza True Latimer, "'Le masque verbal': *Le travestisme textuel de Claude Cahun*," in *Claude Cahun*, (Paris: Jeu de Paume, in association with Hazan, 2011), 81-91. For an discussion of the perverse, monstrous sexuality believed to be possessed by Jews, see Sander Gilman, "Salome, Syphilis, Sarah Bernhardt, and the Modern Jewess," in *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 97-120.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

As I have endeavored to show throughout this paper, Cahun's interest in demolishing categories included the category of Jewishness, which has been perpetually underappreciated in previous scholarship. Though Claude Cahun's artistic enterprise has been recognized as questioning the constructed nature of gender categories in a proto-feminist manner, she spurned the feminist label, at least as it was constituted in her lifetime. She once remarked that Simone de Beauvoir's widely perceived "masculine objectivity" was strange when she was so commonly known to be a woman.⁸¹ She did not accept the idea that her ideas and oeuvre arose from her femaleness. Instead of focusing entirely on gender and sexuality, her oeuvre constitutes a protest against the idea that categories of identity are biological, rather than cultural. By shifting her attention to the signs from one category to another in self-portrait to self-portrait, Cahun can be understood to argue for a cultural (i.e., external) location for gender, sexual, and ethnic identities. That her identification even with her family is largely cultural can be argued through her choice of the name Cahun. In the 1928 self-portrait that recreates the 1917 portrait of her father, the reference to her Jewish identity is largely made through her resemblance to her family and their stereotypically Jewish features. Although this portrait honors her family and reveals a sense of pride in her Jewish identity, many of the allusions to her family and Jewish identity are made through her physical features. By using supposedly biological signs of a Jewish identity that was chiefly cultural for her, the photograph registers Cahun's ambivalence toward categories of identification while denoting a sympathy for this category.

⁸¹ Claude Cahun to Pierre Lévy, 1948, in *Écrits*, edited by François Leperlier, (Paris, Jean Michel Place, 2002), 713.

In her star of David self-portrait and her vampiric self-portrait, Cahun again uses symbols and stereotypes of Jewishness to represent herself. Her Jewish identity was a source of pride and self-concept, even as it offers others a way to label her as a diseased, undesirable presence in society. She absorbs the stereotypes of outsider, specimen, vampire, etc., and repeats them back to us with an air of skepticism that could hardly be described as slight. In a sense, the biological essence of Jewishness and homosexuality compete for dominance in these images. By imaging herself as a multiplicitous Other within individual photographs, she challenges individual categories as the cause of her monstrosity. The supposedly identifiable physical and social traits of both Jewishness and homosexuality overlap. The aberrant traits cannot clearly be traced to their source, denying the causality entailed by biological essentialism. What trait comes from which category? If Cahun were a specimen in a museum, would it be medical or ethnographic museum? How would she be labeled? Beyond this, the stereotypes Cahun evoked vary from photograph to photograph. Each may have its personal resonance for her, but none approaches the totality of her identity, individually or cumulatively.

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FIGURES

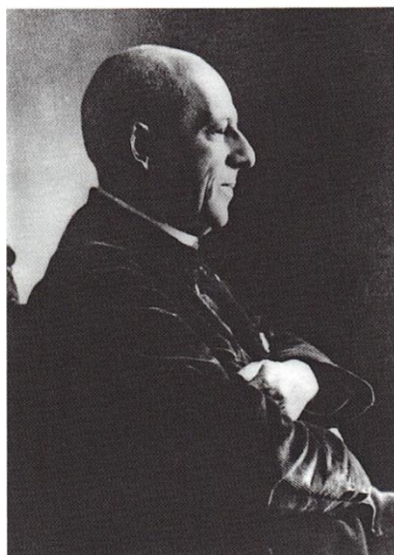


Figure 1. Unknown photographer, portrait of Maurice Schwob, 1917, private collection.



Figure 2. Claude Cahun, untitled self-portrait (with short hair), 1928, silver-gelatin print, 18 x 23.8 cm, private collection.

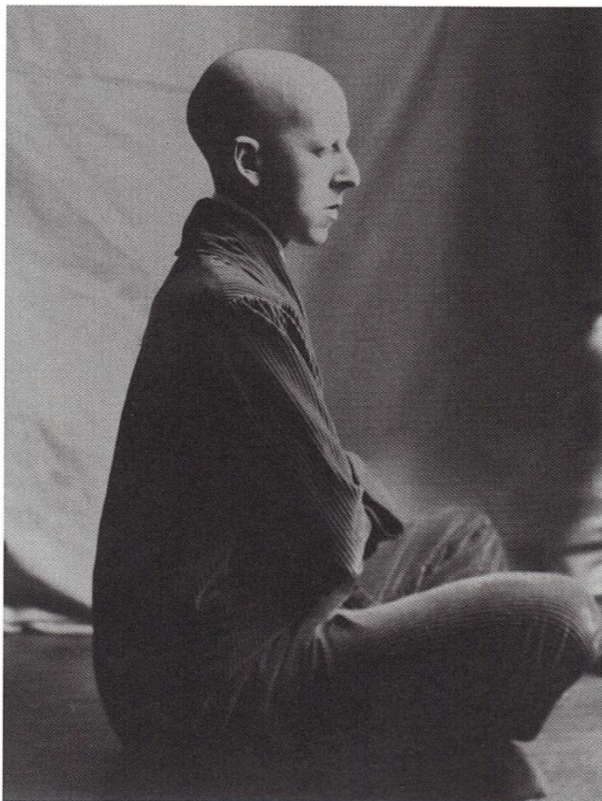


Figure 3. Claude Cahun, untitled self-portrait (with shaved head), 1928, silver-gelatin print, 7.1 x 6 cm, Jersey Heritage Collection, United Kingdom.



Figure 4. Claude Cahun, untitled self-portrait (star of David), circa 1926, silver-gelatin print, 11.2 x 8.2 cm, collection of Leslie Tonkonow and Klaus Ottmann.



Figure 5. Claude Cahun, *Studies for a Keepsake*, circa 1926, four silver-gelatin prints, 14 x 45 cm, Musée d'Art modern de la Ville de Paris, France.



Figure 6. Face with tertiary syphilis, wax moulage, late nineteenth century, possibly German.

Mütter Museum, College of Physicians of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

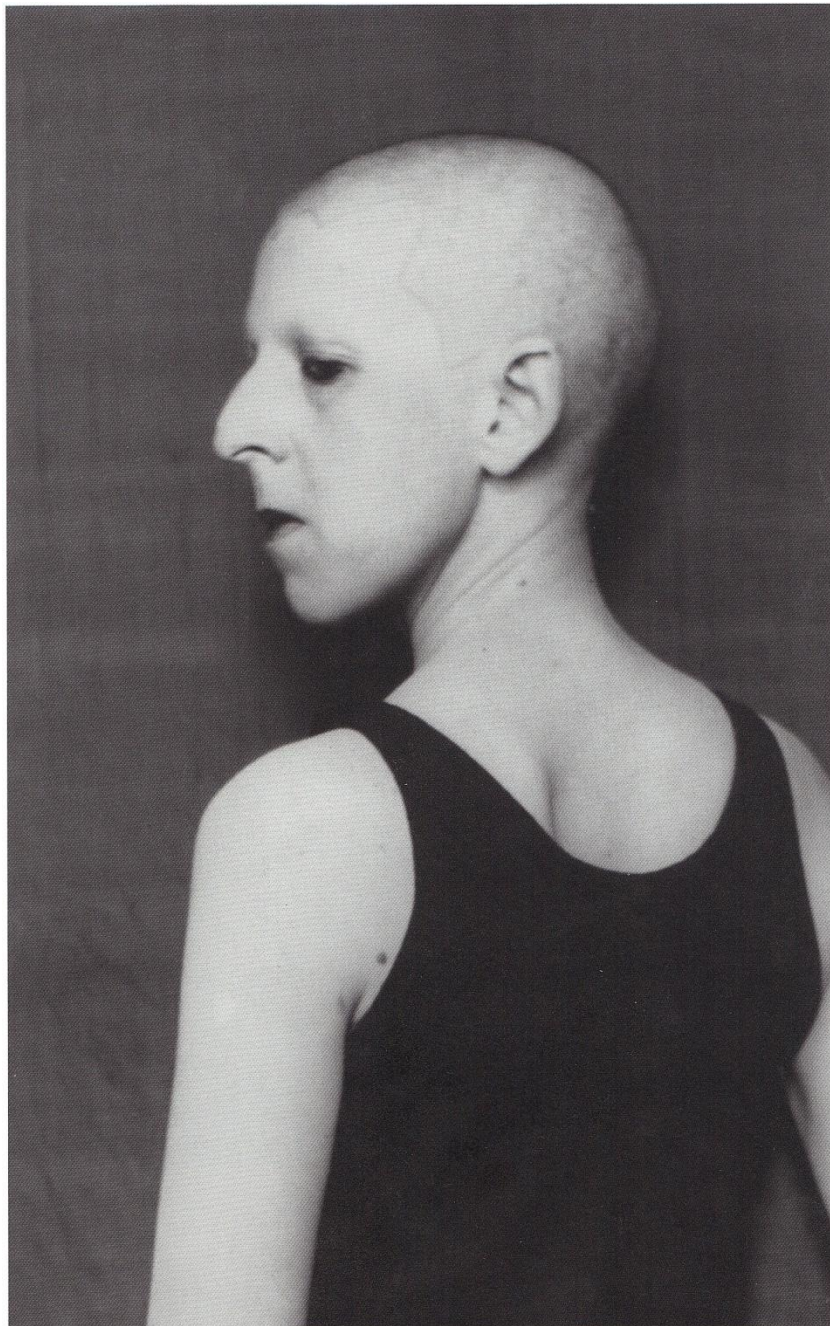


Figure 7. Claude Cahun, untitled self-portrait (vampiric self-portrait), 1928, silver-gelatin print, 23.6 x 14.9 cm, Jersey Heritage Collection, United Kingdom.

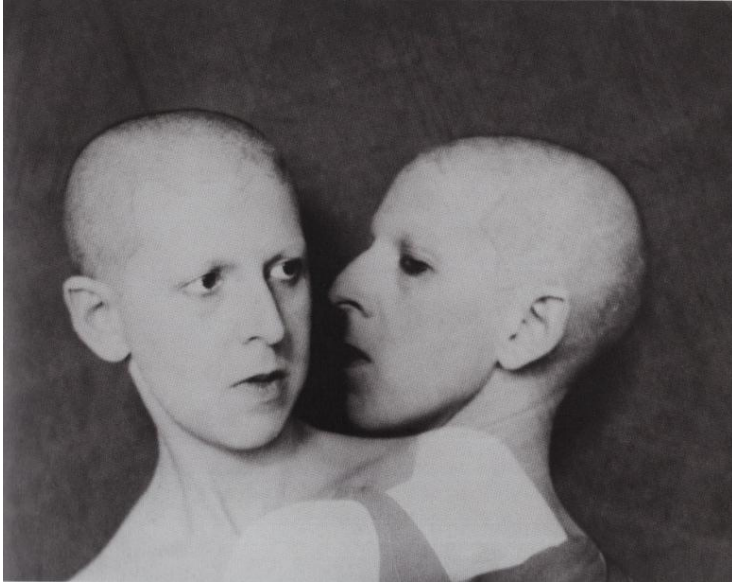


Figure 8. Claude Cahun, *Que me veux-tu?*, 1928, silver-gelatin print, 23 x 18 cm, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, France.

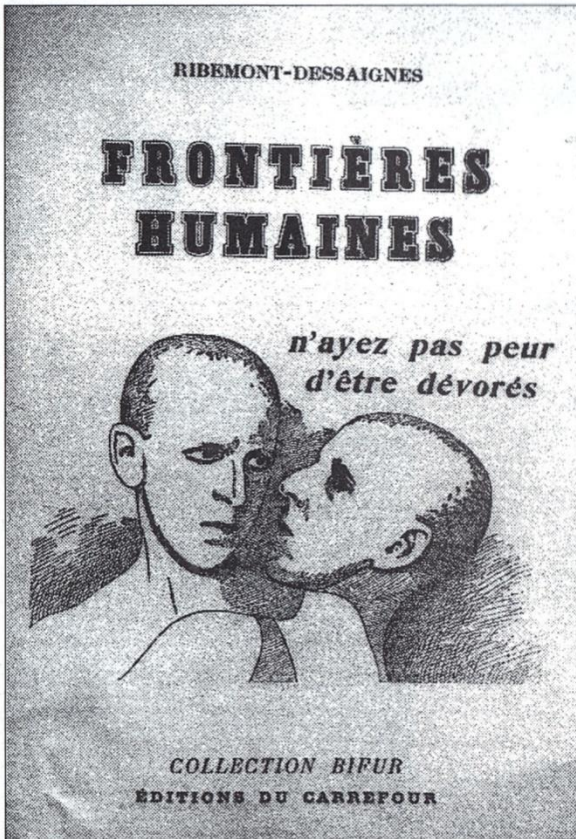


Figure 9. Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Frontières humaines*, (Paris: Editions du Carrefour, 1929.): book jacket.



Figure 10. Profile of Count Orlok, film still, *Nosferatu*, 1922.