

SUBJECT: The Beatrice Davenport Morands

FROM: CHARLIE WHITE

PREFACE: The following essay summarizes an ongoing research project born of unique circumstance and sustained curiosity. I am far from a historian, and my efforts here come from a personal place of interest rather than one of scholarship or academic intent. While living in Pasadena and working at Caltech in the late 1990s, I, like most residents, became aware of the mythic Morand sisters, two of the more unique figures who inhabited the city during its mid-century heyday. Anyone would take interest in a story such as theirs; my interest sharpened, however, when I discovered certain overlaps between their areas of theoretical interest and my own. Nevertheless, the means by which I gained access to the Morand archive was brought about entirely by happy accident. While getting my morning coffee at Caltech's campus café, I had made the casual acquaintance of a Huntington Library archivist who was assisting a professor on campus (Caltech maintains a research fellowship with the library). One day, in the course of conversation, I happened to make passing reference to the Morands, and it was as if I had made a rainbow suddenly appear: the archivist grinned mischievously like some character from a cloak-and-dagger novel, and I was asked if I would be interested in looking over a yet-to-be-disclosed collection recently donated to the library. Since that serendipitous day, I have slowly and rather amateurishly pieced the sisters' story together, weaving the still-incomplete yet fascinating picture that I submit in this modest dispatch.

PART ONE: AN INTRODUCTION

— In summer of 1998, during repairs to a water-damaged finger joint in the basement of the Gamble House—Pasadena's landmark Greene & Greene home built for David and Mary Gamble of the Proctor & Gamble company—a small pantry was discovered beneath two adjoining floor panels. The heretofore unknown compartment, which may have been designed as a natural icebox, contained a rather unexpected find: seventeen perfectly preserved journals penned by the Beatrice Davenport Morands. Well-ensconced within aristocratic Pasadena social lore, the Morands had spent nearly a decade moving among elite cultural and scientific circles immediately after World War II. They were arguably two of the mid-century's most enigmatic female thinkers, and the insights gained from the Morands' recovered journals (currently housed in the nearby Huntington Library) should afford them the credit they deserve for their influence on many dominant figures of their time.

— Beatrice Davenport Morand and her identical twin sister, who went by the same name, lived in and around the Pasadena area from approximately 1947 to 1957, moving from home to home depending on their current standing and immediate circumstances. Popular amongst an eccentric but cultured set, the sisters lived for a period of time at the Parsonage (Jack Parson's bohemian occultist estate along Orange Grove Boulevard), in Constance Perkins' Neutra-designed house while it was being built, and in the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Millard House, while Alice Millard was away on a year-long excursion. However, it was neither their keen sense for interesting people, nor their taste for distinguished architecture that makes the sisters noteworthy; what makes the Morands so unique was that, as far all of their friends and acquaintances knew, Beatrice Davenport Morand was only one person.

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◀ FÉLIX FÉNEON ▲ PF

— Upon entering Pasadena's social circles in 1947, the sisters were first mistaken for an Anthroposophist due to a story one of them told at a garden gathering regarding the "promise of biodynamic farming." In another story, the sisters were rumored to be the unclaimed daughter of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman as a result of a passing comment one of them was said to have made at a midnight poker game at the Wrigley mansion. However, as time went on, Bee-Dee, as her closest friends called her, presented herself as a well-educated Radcliffe girl with a wry sense of humor, a disdain for matrimony, and a fiercely adamant belief in, as she put it, "the necessity of crafting a cinematic self."

— In the summer of 1948, a letter written by Barbara Dougall — a former Pasadena Rose Queen — to a good friend recently relocated in Chicago captures Beatrice in action: "A creature like no other I have yet to meet in Pasadena, the likeable Ms. Morand has the charisma of a preacher, the wit of an east-coast Jew, and the mind of a Stanford professor. Everyone, even Liddy and Rex, is quite taken with her, so it is my intention to get to the bottom of her being uncoupled by way of an invitation to lunch!"

— Enigmatic, insightful, and high-spirited, the Morands were able to jump from white-linen San Marino baby showers to black-cloaked occult gatherings without much flap—knowing nearly everyone there was to know, while calmly popping up everywhere one needed to be without a single double-sighting. However, what truly made an impression on nearly everyone they came to know well was neither their skillful socializing nor their somewhat unusual etiquette; what disarmed others was their unique philosophy of the fictional self. The Beatrice Davenport Morands had what might be considered a proto-Warholian interpretation of how photography, film, and television would determine culture.

— A 1949 journal entry states rather matter-of-factly, "If a man of power today might ever wish to hold that power tomorrow, he best be ready for his image on the television to determine it—not his thoughts or his ideas, but the manner in which he manages himself while speaking live to the manifold audience of this great nation." This passage preceded the first televised presidential debate by six years, an event agreed to have been the determining factor in Kennedy's election to the presidency.

— Another shrewd insight from that same year reconsiders from the photographs from the Farm Security Administration in a very unique manner: "One might see the FSA photographs, particularly that of Evans, Lange, and Vachon, as being of their time and without sentimentality. However, as they trickle into Hollywood these artifacts have fast become the new reality in a fictional recounting of our recent past and evolving present. More of a guide than a documented truth, these testaments of America will only be true when the set-dressing matches the photographs' landscapes, and the faces of the actors match the photographs' poverty-stricken subjects crease for crease, stain for stain!"

— The Morands' ideas quickly became known to a small group of thinkers, and the sisters began to receive offers to talk at intimate intellectual gatherings. The most important of these took place at the Parsonage in 1951, where one of them delivered a talk titled "In light of character representation." This brief lecture opened thus: "In the near to-

morrow, one will have a self drawn from cinema or television with or without one's approval, allowing pre-formed notions of individuality to move with the flow of representation opposing reality." The entire talk lasted precisely thirty minutes — with Morand holding a stopwatch for effect — and ended with an audible exhalation and a final exclamation: "No longer than a television show!" to which she received a standing ovation from the small group.

— An impression of the talk was recounted in the unpublished diary of another speaker visiting Parsons, the young Marshall McLuhan, who, following the publication of *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, was testing out his own lecture materials before bringing them back to the University of Toronto for his forthcoming Communication and Culture seminar. His observations are illuminating: "Not only was Miss Morand acutely aware of television's potential within America's politics of the image; she was able to clarify the differing effects of still and moving imagery, as well as live and recorded narratives on the average person's sense of being. She offered a number of interpretations that I have yet to consider, each rather valid. Further, but perhaps more odd than intellectually impressive, she made her point as if on live television — as if she were acting out the lecture instead of simply delivering it."

— After four years in the Pasadena area, the Morands were becoming known as important thinkers, carefully navigating their position from being part of society to being part of social science. With the secret of their identity paramount to their success, the sisters cautiously entered new circles and made new connections that would allow their theories to flourish — their primary goal from the start.

CONTINUED IN dispatch #3

HUE: RED SHADE: MAROON
HEX: #800000

Mix mud with blood and you'll get maroon.

Beginning with a hum, it ends with a ghost's moan. Both lull and murmur, the hard center deepening its soft blow. Long and lost and sultry. A distant story, a faraway place, never touristed. A survivors' refuge from a catastrophe never spoken of, backboned with with an equally unspeakable gratitude for its escape. But ghosts can't really moan. So the sounds passes from living lips more spirit than flesh. The moan that gathers mouths for maroon still whispers sex.

Move in unexpectedly close to your lover, place your cheek against theirs and utter a breathy 'maroon.' Your affair will cost dearly, but he will be the only lover in your deathbed dreams. Maroon is a catastrophe, a sudden turn, its couplings a brace for survivors.

Maroon comes from the French word for chestnut, but wandering languages and lashing tongues trip into each other. Besides, chestnut simply lacks the sanguinary stain of maroon.

Maroon can have a more dubious origin. Perhaps a Spaniard's cimarrón, literally 'mountain top dwellers,' but more truthfully used for escaped household animals. Some francophones claim maroon for

'feral,' and other scholars say the word falls to English from Arawak. Before their enslavement and murder, the Arawaks handed down 'barbeque,' 'canoe,' and 'tobacco,' the last a lasting poison and solace for all those marooned, a parting curse from an assassinated civilization.

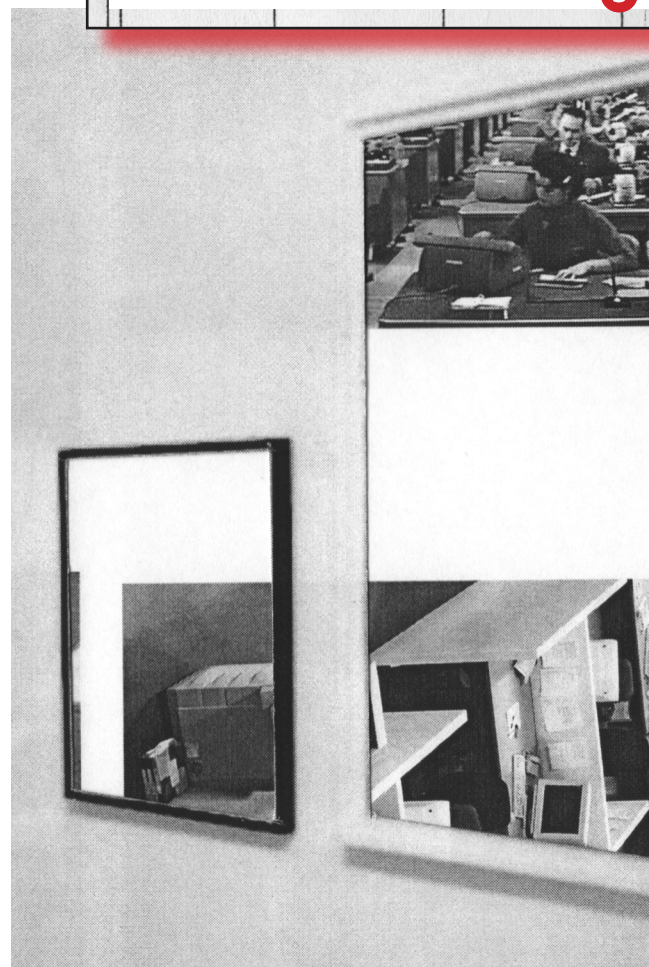
In each case, it means the same. Dangerously wild, fierce and free.

Maroon names the escaped slaves who hid in the wilderness from Jamaica to the Great Dismal Swamp, living on the fringes. Plantation raiders and emancipators, maroons crushed some colonials into extracting treaties, others befriended and mixed with the natives, the other American animals escaping prison, slavery, and certain death. Maroon is the color of hard freedom.

The pirates picked up in their Caribbean rambling this word from the isolated islanders. Maroon became the punishment for a misbehaving sailor or a mutineered captain. Dropped off on a remote island, the custom was to gift the castaway a bit of food, a swallow of water, and a pistol with a single shot.

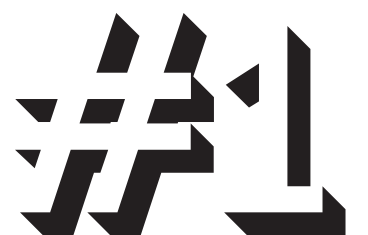
Those marooned and retrieved back into civilization always regret their return in the end. The hard freedom of maroon once gone is forever lost.

— ANDREW BERARDINI



Inspired by THE GALLERIA DEL DEPOSITO newsletter (produced between 1963–1968) & in honor of foreign correspondents everywhere, this is the first in a series of dispatches coming out of PUBLIC FICTION's office.

Each Dispatch will contain:
 1) Faits Divers inspired by FÉLIX FÉNEON's *Novels In Three Lines*. Published in 1906 for the newspaper LE MATIN.
 2) Correspondence of all kinds. This particular telegram is from the Los Angeles Public Library archive, author unknown.
 3) A report on color from ANDREW BERARDINI's *The Standard Book Of Color*.
 4) A Dispatch from our Los Angeles Writer and
 5) an image by our French Artist / Correspondent in Paris.



▲ March 1st: PUBLIC FICTION opens an office, of sorts.