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Time's Citizens:

American Fiction and the Sexual Politics of U.S. Civic Membership, 1886-1929

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

William Stoughton Clark

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Time's Citizens:

American Fiction and the Sexual Politics of U.S. Civic Membership, 1886-1929

by

William Stoughton Clark

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Christopher J. Looby, Co-Chair

Professor Richard A. Yarborough, Co-Chair

"Time's Citizens" explores how American fiction shaped the public classification of sexual identification and civic membership in the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During a period when discourses of anti-progressive deviance were used for purposes of civic exclusion, "Time's Citizens" argues that a subset of novelists deployed the qualities ascribed to queers in order to claim civic presence. As critics have shown, the U.S. novel in both its realist and its romantic incarnations has long depicted heterosexual life to underwrite civil belonging. The novels of my study—Henry James's *The Bostonians*, William Dean Howells's *A Hazard of New Fortunes,* Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*, Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, and Nella Larsen's *Passing* and *Quicksand*—expose and critique this formation through their depiction of racial, sexual, and gendered exclusion. Even as the modern

sexual binary was coming into articulation, these novels show queer modes of belonging that did not assimilate to the heteronormative model standardized in the law and assumed in most literature. "Time's Citizens" claims that this strain of U.S. fiction reveals the limitations on rights for subjects who did not contribute to the narrative of national progress, which was associated with marriage, reproductive futurity, property ownership, and the regulated time of the industrial economy.

In dialogue with current trends in queer theory and historiography, "Time's Citizens" suggests that the novel was uniquely positioned to register the political stakes of queer difference. Deploying the temporal deviance used to represent queer subjects and their relation to, antagonism toward, or erasure by the progressive, reproductive state, the novel was able to represent modes of civic presence that were becoming impossible under U.S. social and legal regimes. To explore the relation between politics and the novel, "Time's Citizens" works at the intersection of legal studies, critical race theory, and the investigations of queer time to show how marginal figures of a variety of identities relate to the ongoing struggle for equal rights and representation. When taken together, the novels of this study question the presumption of normativity and view queerness as a mode of identification deeply tied to civic structures and local politics. Instead of carving a separate sphere for queer being, these texts sought relations to citizenship not predicated on conformity but able to accommodate more diverse modes of expression and identification.

The dissertation of William Stoughton Clark is approved.

Yogita Goyal

Carrie Leah Hyde

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University of California, Los Angeles

2018

For family, the ones who got me here, and those I found along the way.

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The UCLA English Department has been more of a home that I ever could have imagined when I took my first class as an undergrad; from poetry workshops to grad seminars to teaching classes myself, I cannot imagine my life without this department. The department's generous staff, and superb faculty have made the rigors and difficulties of graduate school something that I will always look back on with respect and pride. Jeanette Gilkison, Janel Munguia, Michael Lambert helped me through the process of grad school on the administrative side; I remember and am thankful for all that help. Thanks for the many conversations with Joseph Bristow, Michael Cohen, Helen Deutsch, Raphael Pérez-Torres, Marissa López, Reed Wilson, Justin Torres, and Uri McMillan; your advice, conversation, and perspective have always been invaluable. The Americanist Research Colloquium proved an extraordinary place to share work, as well as to learn from other scholars from all stages in their careers; I'm also grateful for the attentive readers of the 20/21 Reading group. Chris Mott, you've made our teaching environment the envy of the university; whatever I know about instruction is thanks to you. Not by any means least, our department has devoted essential resources to its graduate students that have made my research and progress possible in an environment of scarcity; as a recipient of multiple Department fellowships, including the Grace M. Hunt Award for Archival Research, I have benefited greatly from the department's generosity. I am grateful to have learned in and been supported by such a place as this.

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VITA

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Introduction

> *It seems to me I can look over and behold them, in Germany, Italy, France, Spain—Or far, far away, in China, or in Russia or India—talking other dialects;*
> *And it seems to me if I could know those men better, I should become attached to them, as I do to men in my own lands,*
> *It seems to me they are as wise, beautiful, benevolent, as any in my own lands;*
> *O I know we should be brethren and lovers, I know I should be happy with them.*[1]
> —Walt Whitman*, "Live Oak with Moss"*
>
> *To no respectable young man of my acquaintance did I dare make known my dreadful secret, which I believed would alienate from me every respectable member of society who should learn it.*[2]
> —Ralph Werther, *Autobiography of an Androgyne*
>
> *Changed understandings of marriage are characteristic of a Nation where new dimensions of freedom become apparent to new generations.*[3]
> —Justice Anthony Kennedy, *Obergefell v. Hodges*

"A more perfect union": these oft-quoted words from the Preamble to the 1789 U.S. Constitution cut to the heart of the U.S. political imaginary of progress and democratic evolution.[4] They have a surprising durability in political rhetoric: from Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural address, to Barack Obama's frequent deployment of the phrase, the idea of the progressive national project endures in the promise that the nation's imperfections motivate the continued refinement of our democratic experiment. But embedded within the "more perfect union" is also one of the most powerful and exclusionary metaphors around which membership

---

[1] Walt Whitman and Michael Warner, *The Portable Walt Whitman*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 569.

[2] Ralph Werther et al., *Autobiography of an Androgyne*, (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 142.

[3] *Obergefell v. Hodges* 576 U.S. 1 (2015).

[4] U.S. Const. Preamble.

in the union itself has been imagined and politically deployed: the normalized marriage and the monogamous heterosexual couple. The connection between political and marital unions has a long history. Stretching back to the nation's first years, monogamous marriage metaphorized the ideal of U.S. national life in the legal and political rhetoric used to understand the shape and function of the new government.[5] As a contractual relation between consenting parties, marital unions both symbolized the relation of the individuals to the nation and exhibited the desirable qualities of citizens to which U.S. members should aspire.[6] The symbolic importance of the metaphor became especially charged immediately following the Civil War, when the stakes for national unity were exceptionally high.[7] At this crucial historical moment, fiction itself took a significant role in recirculating the metaphor to a mass audience. Responding to this national trauma, romances of reunion rejuvenated the metaphor's relevance in U.S. literature, in which North-South marriages symbolized the prospects of sectional reunification, economic security, and national growth. Alongside legal and political rhetoric, fiction towards the end of the nineteenth century reified the status of the marital family as a metonym for the healthy civic body. However, where fiction deployed the union to model the characteristics of good citizenship, it also posited an inverse in the non-normative subject. Conformity became a

---

[5] See, for example, Joan Gunderson, "Independence, Citizenship, and the American Revolution" *Signs* 13, no. 1 (Aug. 1987), 689-721.

[6] Marriage represented the dynamic of Federal governance through the ideal of the family, indexing contractual relation between consenting adults to the strengthened federal government of the 1789 constitution and the states under its aegis. For an overview of the metaphorization of marriage, See Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 11.

[7] For an overview of literary responses, see Joyce Appleby "Reconciliation and the Northern Novelist, 1865-1880," *Civil War History* 10, no. 2 (June 1964): 117–29.

function of the progressive state through the future promised by the more perfect union, and deviation a danger to it.

The force of the union metaphor intensified after the Civil War in an unexpected way thanks to an ill-timed coincidence: the arrival of the modern sexual binary in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the rising distinction between heterosexual normalcy and homosexual deviance. The influence of these colliding discourses was wide ranging: even as the trope of the marital union increasingly represented the future prospects of a reunified country, a counter-discourse around sexuality emerged that distinguished normal, permissible sexual behavior from its opposite. The literary and public attachment between the normalized marital union and national life became so established that, as Amy Kaplan suggests, the structural role of heterosexual domesticity "anchor[ed] the real" by providing a neutral substrate against which the novel could provide its social diagnoses of contemporary civic life.[8] Moreover, according to Nina Silber, heterosexual marriage emphasized the "clearly defined laws and hierarchies" that stabilize national cohesion.[9] In the prevailing consensus from the postbellum moment onward, alignment with heterosexual life formed the basis of social belonging and good standing. By contrast, nonconformity from middle-class marital life became grounds for civic exclusion and state denunciation. Coming into being at the moment when the health and future of the nation were increasingly figured through the desirable characteristics of the heterosexual citizen, newly visible queer and non-normative figures found themselves in a bind. At once awakened to the

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[8] Kaplan makes this claim at various junctures. Regarding William Dean Howells, she relates instability in both *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* to the aftereffects of the Civil War. See Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 69. See also 41-43 for other similar novels and Kaplan's reading of Howells.

[9] Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 6.

possibility of shared experience with other non-normative subjects both within the nation and beyond, they also became targets of social censorship, derision, and fear in an increasingly hostile political, legal, and social public sphere. The aspiration for a more perfect union rapidly came to signify not an evolutionary possibility of change and inclusion for queer people, but rather a coercive turn to assimilation and erasure within a homogeneous norm.

Where many historical accounts of sexuality after the Civil War and the advent of the modern sexual binary imagine that queer sociality is inevitably one of social outcasts and outsiders, on the outskirts of citizenship and belonging, "Time's Citizen's" tells a different story. Even as the genre of the novel absorbed the rising social-sexual power structure, some queer authors imagined realms in which non-normative sexuality were not inimical to U.S. civic life. The novels examined in "Time's Citizens" operate against the predominating backdrop of the symbolic marital citizen circulated in many novels after the postbellum moment by providing alternative visions of potential membership to the homogenizing tableau of the "sanitized space" of heterosexual citizenship.[10] Henry James's *The Bostonians*, William Dean Howells's *A Hazard of New Fortunes,* Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*, Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, and Nella Larsen's *Passing* and *Quicksand*, all challenged the centrality of the normative, reproductive family in representations of desirable citizenship. But these novels claimed legitimacy in a particular way, using the language of political and legal exclusion to imagine alternative forms and discourses of civic belonging. From James's queering of women's rights advocacy to Nella Larsen's representation of the queer figure as alien, these authors exploit the contemporary discourse around the alien, citizen, and national subject to understand the terms of their marginalization. Their aim is not only to understand the omission of queer figures from the

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[10] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 54–66, 549.

civic body but also to imagine possibilities and contexts for their inclusion that did not necessitate capitulation to normative standards.

The political terms of membership around which queers contested their exclusion were not merely rhetorical or metaphorical. Their efforts operated under a significant paradigm shift in U.S. legal history: the consolidated definition of citizenship and equal rights codified by the Fourteenth Amendment's ratification in 1868. Born out of the need to affirm citizenship where it had previously been withheld, the Fourteenth Amendment authorized a new way of conceiving citizenship for all natural-born Americans, regardless of race or creed. But the amendment did not stop there. In addition to providing citizenship to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States," it included some of the most vital language in U.S. law for protecting civil rights.[11] Along with preserving the "privileges and immunities" of citizens born or naturalized in the U.S., the Amendment specifies that the government cannot "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws," extending the egalitarian promise beyond the exclusive confines of citizenship to the broader category of persons.[12]

The Fourteenth Amendment's signal shift in U.S. history and law had wide-ranging impacts, including on the relation of the literary imagination to public life. As Carrie Hyde argues, literature and the law were closely intertwined in the period before Fourteenth Amendment *because* citizenship was not formally defined in the Constitution. For this reason, Hyde demonstrates, literature played a key role in shaping the conceptualization of citizenship in the absence of a formalized definition; fiction stepped in by providing a language for imagining

[11] U.S. Const. amend. XIV § 1.

[12] Ibid., § 1.

what might define the citizen without Constitutional clarity.[13] The scope of the formalized protections promised by the Amendment, however, was not immediately clear.[14] Where the Fourteenth Amendment defines citizenship concretely, the domain between citizens and persons opens up other ambiguities in the newly-articulated rights and protections that the Supreme Court was reticent to expand without first developing legal precedent.[15] As legal scholar Michael Perry argues, the ambiguity born of this move to the rights of persons is vital for understanding the history of postbellum civil rights, especially with regard to new classes of people not yet imagined by the Amendment's authors.[16] Indeed, since the Amendment's ratification, the contours and reach of its equal protections for citizens and subjects alike has been contested, revised, and revisited in some of the most far-reaching Supreme Court Cases that define new areas and classes of rights, especially involving the sexual lives of national subjects.[17] Where the Fourteenth Amendment closed one enduring problem in the legal tradition, new forms and areas for intervention opened.

Literature that engaged with legal concepts shifted as well in scope and target. One development that the literary imagination faced was the heightened Federal power and

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[13] Carrie Hyde, *Civic Longing: The Speculative Origins of U.S. Citizenship* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 5-7.

[14] Ibid., 184-85.

[15] The movement to personhood has been important for modern expansions of rights protections to LGBT subjects. On personhood and sexuality see. Michael J. Perry, *We the People: The Fourteenth Amendment and the Supreme Court* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 54-57; 141-142.

[16] As Michael Perry discusses, though this language was aimed at rectifying *Dred Scott* and the exclusion of Black Americans from citizenship, the Amendment also permitted future Congressional action. Ibid., esp. 52-53.

[17] Landmark cases notably considering sexual and marital rights include *Loving v. Virginia*, (1967), *Bowers v. Hardwick (1986), Romer v. Evans* (1997), *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), and, most recently, *United States v Windsor* (2013), and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015).

centralization that followed the Reconstruction Amendments and Federal Reconstruction.[18] As W. C. Harris explains, where the consolidation of the Federal government after the Civil War and the rise of stronger institutions gave the veneer of national unification and uniform citizenship, "institutionalization has in fact not solved the problem of unity" as a fundamental national objective.[19] For Harris, literature offered an opportunity to consider the enduring failings in civic unity because authors could subvert institutional narratives. Harris, however, minimizes the role that literature played in also promoting a homogeneous ideal of the citizen, as especially made evident by the concurrent ubiquity of the marital union as a prominent literary metaphor. The literary illustration of institutional limits, then, was not always evenly applied and could often reinforce new modes of division and exclusion. The struggle of marginalized subjects necessitated discovering ways to articulate the fissures in the distribution of protections that endured long after an expanded government attempted, and swiftly failed, to deliver legal equality uniformly.

In this light, rather than ending with the Fourteenth Amendment, literature's role in imagining citizenship's offerings and threats refocused on the unseen gaps that remained, especially for the new class of sexual subjects who were only just becoming visible. While the Courts worked to develop precedent and interpretation around the Fourteenth Amendment's terminological ambiguity, literature took a parallel role and responded to shifting social and

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[18] For a discussion of the way the intersection of Reconstruction and the Reconstruction Amendments dramatically shifted U.S. Federal Government, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), esp. 231-239.

[19] W. C. Harris, *E Pluribus Unum: Nineteenth-Century American Literature & the Constitutional Paradox* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 5.

institutional expectations, imagining what failed to register in the law itself.[20] The imaginative capacity of literature to explore social interactions and individual psychic experience offered a vital forum for drawing the dimensions of personhood the law had not yet conceived.[21] To understand the impact and aftereffects of the Fourteenth Amendment's paradigm shift, "Time's Citizens" bridges scholarship across the fields of literature, the law, and sexuality studies to show how select classes of people excluded from rights projections navigated the political and social world that saw them as threats. Even as citizenship was codified in its modern rubric, the burden on the marginalized was to narrate and describe the outer limits of the national vision of equality and inclusion in ways that could bring the law to bear in their favor.

The gap in equal protections is approached in the novels of this study through what I call queer national subjects—that is, those with the nominal rights protections of citizens who yet fall outside of full political, civic, and social membership on account of their sexual subjectivity. It is the new ambiguity between citizenship's nominal rights and the distribution of its protections that the queer national subject navigates—both within the jurisdiction of the nation and yet marked apart. Most importantly, the idea of the queer national subject in a literary text emphasizes access to the *subjectivity* of figures marginalized because of their sexual expression. To be a subject but not to have publicly recognized interiority, to seem alien psychologically and to be alienated from rights protections—these conceptual intersections mark a burgeoning literary interest in kinds of categorization that were being contested within the law between the

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[20] As Crane argues, literature's ambition to explore broader characteristics of civic life and equality have helped to inform legal interventions from the late-Nineteenth Century on. See Gregg Crane, *Race, Citizenship, and Law in American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[21] Carrie Hyde writes that where "what" constitutes citizenship was defined by birthright, "the 'who' of citizenship has proven to be a more enduring battle." This "who" was a productive province for fiction: it distinguished who counted as persons, a question especially significant for the queer subjects that the law had no precedent by which to understand or guard. Ibid., 185.

citizen, person, subject, and alien. “Time’s Citizens” convenes novels that think through the politics of sex across manifestations of citizenship as a rhetorical and legal category and that militate against fiction invested in the marriage form. The difficulty of inhabiting this interstitial territory between legal security and legal danger is at the heart of the efforts of these novels to imagine, to narrate, and to publicize new arrangements of membership and belonging.

The attempt to posit different modes of civic life complicates the queer theoretical imperative to disengage from mainstream politics in favor of radical change to exclusionary social structures. “Time’s Citizens” contends instead that queerness should not be read as always opting out of the political frameworks that position queerness itself as a threat. What many contemporary critics in queer literary studies miss are the terms and contexts of marginalization and exclusion that are woven into the fabric and the language of the texts themselves. As violent as social and civic marginalization could be, it also provided queer figures with a unique opportunity to shape politics, often forgotten in histories of queer experience that emphasize abjection, isolation, and other negative affects born of fear and outcast status. In this sense, these authors inhabit a kind of optimism—one tinged by the looming prospects of failure—that enabled them to posit the possibility of queer experience not merely by rejecting a heterosexual civic norm.[22] Critics like Heather Love suggest that queer figures reacted to the novelty of the sexual binary by looking backwards with a feeling of loss to previous, less contentious forms of queer expression.[23] The texts of this study pose different questions. Through them, I ask: were

[22] Lauren Berlant describes how in the late twentieth century, the promise of economic security forms a cruel optimism. She describes this optimism as an “object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility” that actually “makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or people is striving.” See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

[23] Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), esp. 29.

queers always non-normative in the way that they considered their politics? What might it look like for queer subjects, as Michel Foucault puts it, to "speak on their own behalf" in the face of social and civic exclusion?[24] Perhaps queer critique of late moves past forms of engagement with the terms of the political too swiftly. "Time's Citizens" makes the case, even during the formation of queerness as a subjectivity, that some sexual deviants imagined queer participation in national life relatively early in the consolidation of the modern sexual hierarchy. But they did it in a limited way: by figuring and imagining a citizen body in which the sanitized field of heterosexual normalcy was not the defining characteristic. They imagined a kind of membership through an array of both familiar and pathologized attachments, affections, and desires—including their own.

Neither Citizen nor Alien: Categories of Social and Political Subject

The attempt at dramatization, representation, and imagination of these novels re-ignites longstanding questions about citizenship as a category and as a measure of belonging. After all, citizenship can function as an imaginative, aspirational term—but also as a normalizing and coercive force. In its most basic legal function, it is predicated on the stark division between subjects with power and protection in the state and those without, differentiating the citizen from the alien. But it additionally describes other methods for recognizing belonging and membership that are more complex both in the law and in the rhetoric by which citizenship is deployed to signify the rights and privileges of social, civic, or political participation. The negotiations around citizenship as a term, a vessel for rights protections, and a declaration of membership occurred in two related dimensions: one through the deployment of the limited category of the

[24] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 101.

citizen in the postbellum context of the law, and the other through the rhetorical deployment of citizenship as a recognition of extrajuridical membership (that is, the forms of national, social, and cultural belonging, among others, that are not explicitly delimited within the law itself). Jurisdictional membership is never as cut and dried as the dichotomy separating the citizen with full rights from the alien without would imply, just as suggested by the ambiguity of personhood in the Fourteenth Amendment. Within these ambiguities, "Time's Citizens" examines the intersection of the national and the sexual subject—specifically, the national queer subject—where the rights of civic belonging and the protections of citizenship break down in ways that could disproportionately affect queer people, in all their diverse identifications.[25]

The demotion from citizen of the nation to person jurisdictionally subject to the nation originates from the series of interlocking relations and historical privileges afforded by class, sex, gender, and race. These interlocking categories conspire to move otherwise legally recognized citizens toward the category of subjects with more ambiguous protections because of the narrow assumptions and biases around heterosexuality, whiteness, and maleness, that have historically underwritten citizenship in the U.S. context.[26] National queer subjects inhabited this interstitial territory through their sexual orientation and ensuing cultural attachments, though not evenly and not always visibly. The ones represented in the novels discussed in "Time's Citizens"

[25] Queerness conjures both material realities and more abstract modes of resistance that do not index sexual practices per se. When I speak in this dissertation of the queer subject, I do not mean to reify that subject but rather to inhabit the ambivalence of queerness in both evoking a historical identity and slipping away from one. For a discussion of these ambiguities, see Sedgwick's distinction between queerness as a mode of resistance and as having a material history in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 4.

[26] In both internal segregation and border regulation, forms of kinship and domesticity that deviated from the heteronormative family, as Nayan Shah explains, became "pathological, aberrant, and incompatible with cultural support and political privilege," further imbricating citizenship as a technology that operated across lines of race and sex. Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 6.

were citizens under the law, but nonetheless navigated social and civic exclusion: either because of their self-identification, the way they were identified in public, the kinds of kinship futures they were offered and inhabited, or the way they were impacted by regimes of policing that often forced a wedge between public and private life that was not experienced by heterosexual subjects, especially as demonstrated in kinship and intimate relationships.[27] As such, queer national subjects might have nominal rights as citizens that were circumscribed due to their sexual status and existence outside of defined categories of permissible expression.

The ensuing ways in which marginalized subjects experience national exclusion occur across the extrajuridical subcategories by which scholars assess various modes and dimensions of citizenship. Outside its most basic legal definition, citizenship is a slippery term in part because, as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, it is modified and qualified.[28] Some qualifications include social, civic, political, consumer, cultural, and sexual citizenship, among others, each signifying the way one relates to these dimensions of national life.[29] Beyond the subcategories themselves, scholars tend to discuss the recognition within a group in different registers, increasing in degree: belonging, membership, and citizenship. Though often used

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[27] Nayan Shah argues that the heteronormative fiction of the nuclear family is a "conceptual crutch that renders any other form of kinship and household structure pathological, aberrant, and incompatible with cultural support and political privilege." Shah, *Stranger Intimacy,* 6.

[28] The OED among other dictionaries observes the distinction between citizenship as a legal category pertaining to national status, and as a claim to membership that is often modified by an adjective. "citizenship, n.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/33521?redirectedFrom=citizenship (accessed March 08, 2018).

[29] The majority of scholars on sexual citizenship agree on the framework drawn by T.H. Marshal of the political, civic, and social domains of citizenship. In the late twentieth century context, ideas of consumer citizenship have also risen as a way of indexing access to economic fairness. For the political, civic, and social distinction, see T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 10. For the consumer citizenship distinction, see David Evans, *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Diane Richardson, "Sexuality and Citizenship," *Sociology* 32, no. 1 (1998): 83–100.

somewhat indiscriminately, these degrees are worth distinguishing because of the stability or tenuousness of the inclusion they imply. Belonging applies the most broadly, suggesting being connected to or constituting another.[30] Membership suggests group, institutional, or organizational status, and citizenship is generally held at a national level (though, as cultural citizenship or consumer citizenship imply, the national distinction is not exclusive).[31] The movement from a feeling of belonging to the recognition of a person as a citizen conveys the sense that one's inclusion becomes more secure by approaching the more concrete, delimited category of citizenship. Yet the transition from feeling related to and recognition within a group is a complex one. Lauren Berlant, for example, suggests that social membership becomes visible at the affective level in the measurement "between the scene of feeling and the effects that politics exert," especially in context of membership's failure.[32] In other words, gradations in feelings of belonging, on the one hand, and the material realities of membership through which political action is achieved, on the other, separate the ways in which group belonging operates. While Berlant distinguishes this shift between feeling and politics in terms of social membership exclusively, the distinction applies more broadly: it helps to account for the feeling of belonging as the most elusive form and citizenship as the most concrete description of inclusion. Membership lies between these forms of group status as a material reality and as a level of affect

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[30] "belonging, n.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/17508?rskey=yROybN&result=2&isAdvanced=false (accessed March 08, 2018). The dimensions that define belonging are not generally theorized in the scholarship on sexual citizenship.

[31] "membership, n.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116302?redirectedFrom=membership (accessed March 08, 2018). I refer to the dictionary here because of the slippage with which both belonging, and membership are used in the context of citizenship discussions.

[32] Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 189.

especially visible when membership is withheld, when group inclusion is lost, or when abjection takes hold.[33] Movement across these registers also evokes another dimension of citizenship's conceptual relation to ideas of progress in that the movement from abstract belonging into full citizenship represents realization of a desired destination, an apex to be reached. "Time's Citizens" traces the uncertainty generated in the movement between these different feelings, timelines, and registers of inclusion or exclusion.

Among these subcategories of membership and belonging, the subcategory of the sexual citizen uniquely cuts across social, political, and civic subspecies because the *feeling* of sexual exclusion has unique affective attributes. Sexual citizenship has unique characteristics due to the very nature of sexuality itself: sexual attachments, identifications, and practices circulate on the body in both public and private ways in terms of scrutiny, bodily pathology, public performance, and spaces of expression.[34] Moreover, as sociological and legal scholarship around sexual citizenship observes, civic, political, and social membership is deeply marked on the basis of one's sexual subjectivity, internally or externally perceived.[35] Sexual citizenship, in this context, has a longstanding history, in which normative modes of sexual practice—especially as

[33] Elsewhere Berlant writes: "the definitional field of citizenship—denoting simple identification by a national category, a reflexive operation of agency and criticism, or a mode of social membership . . . seek[s] to create a proper national subject and subjectivities." This rubric differs from my approach in divesting from describing the interplay between legal categories and their disjointed offspring in the rhetorical field. Elsewhere in *Queen of America*, Berlant denotes the role of sentiment as a mode of feeling that mediates how we think of citizenship. Ibid., 31.

[34] On the varying modes of public scrutiny of LGBTQ life, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); and Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2010), esp. 52.

[35] As Brenda Cossman observes, sexual citizenship "cuts across multiple divisions of citizenship literature . . . with differing visions of citizenship as rights, political engagement, normative ideal, and/or disciplinary practice." Brenda Cossman, *Sexual Citizens: The Legal and Cultural Regulation of Sex and Belonging* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007), 7. See also Diane Richardson, "Sexuality and Citizenship," *Sociology* 32, no. 1 (1998): 83–100, 84.

recognized through marriage and reproductive contribution—have been used as a method for policing citizens and curtailing citizens' rights, as well as being deployed as a regulating metaphor.[36]

Against this backdrop, sexual difference, as Diane Richardson puts it, made queer people *partial citizens* across multiple categories of membership and belonging.[37] The sense of partiality complicates movements that seek increased sexual citizenship because of what inclusion can erase: in offering a means to equality, it operates with a "double discourse" that also threaten to nullify the unique cultural practices and identities that were formed in protest to citizenship's coercive homogeneity.[38] The partiality of citizenship for queer people, as a result, plays a large and complicated role in contextualizing citizenship as an aspiration often charged not by what it offers but by the dangers of its withholding. For queer subjects, fully realized citizenship is double-edged, both a characteristic to seek for the benefits of political and civic representation and inclusion, and a danger in the threat of assimilation within normative structures. As such, the desire for unconditional belonging—the coercive draw to conform in order to be recognized—participated in excluding or masking queer national subjects in ways that amplified the affective gap of non-belonging and withheld membership. These cumulative operations culminated in making full membership or citizenship status appear ephemeral, conditional, or second-class for queer national subjects even when they were not explicitly excluded in the letter of the law.[39]

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[36] See for example Leslie Harris, *State of the Marital Union: Rhetoric, Identity, and Nineteenth-Century Marriage Controversies* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

[37] Richardson, "Sexuality and Citizenship", 89.

[38] See Amy L. Brandzel, "Queering Citizenship? Same-Sex Marriage and the State," *GLQ* 11, no. 2 (2005): 171–204, 176.

[39] For a discussion of the relationship of the marriage debates to understandings of second-class citizenship, see Harold H. Punke, "Second-Class Citizenship," *The Social Studies* 63, no. 3 (1972): 127–

Becoming Excluded: Bureaucratic and Public Responses to Queer Subjects

Literature approached the changing shape of national belonging and citizenship as a legal category amidst significant and ongoing developments in U.S. law, legislation, and politics that became more openly hostile to queer figures. On the one hand, the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment provided definitional clarity: it anchored citizenship on the basis of birthright and naturalization within the territorial confines of the United States and advanced provisions for equal protections under the law and due process for preserving life, liberty, and property. However, as the subsequent legislative history attests, securing citizenship to U.S. soil encouraged the development of other methods for constraining rights on account of deviation from desired norms or presumed lack of contribution to modern social progress. Due to the recent advent of citizenship as a constitutionally defined category with the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment and the halting development of legal interpretations and precedent, its protections seemed much more tenuous. From the Expatriation Act of 1868, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924, to the Nineteenth Amendment (ratified 1921), laws in Congress and Supreme Court cases such as *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* (1898) continued to modify the shape of citizenship and its exclusivity in ways that cut across categories of race and sex.[40] Especially since the demographic makeup of the national polity was simultaneously undergoing rapid change, the contours and limits of newly won rights

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31. It is also worth noting how tenuous many changes to protections for LGBTQ people are between Federal administrations; the Obama-era end of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" as well as the permission of military service for trans people, and LGBT workplace protections have all been endangered by the current administration.

[40] For an extensive discussion of the shifting legal and political approach to and restrictions around citizenship during this time period and through these developments, see Martha Mabie Gardner, *The Qualities of a Citizen: Women, Immigration, and Citizenship, 1870-1965* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005).

of citizenship were still under negotiation as public life and legal frameworks adapted. As courts responded to citizenship's expansion, they turned to the ways in which citizenship was historically, legislatively, and popularly conceived, sometimes producing outcomes that limited the practical application of the rights of citizens. On this uncertain legal terrain, to deviate from policed norms invoked not just the threat of social ostracization or imprisonment but the prospect, even if unrealized, of loss of country, soil, and nation.[41]

From the early visible moments of sexual deviance in the public sphere, same-sex love was treated as a threatening novelty that the civic body should reject. The rejection of same-sex relationships here cuts in two ways: it consolidates the idea of heterosexual normalcy against deviant sexual attraction; but it also consolidates the civic body against the threatening novelty of the sexual outcast. Even as regimes for policing sexuality emerged, the public sphere played a significant role in broadcasting the visibility and pathology of sexual deviance when it interacted with the law. Even before the Oscar Wilde trial marked public homosexuality as the "love that dare not speak its name," the U.S. press sensationalized an 1892 murder between two Lesbians, when Alice Mitchell murdered her lover Freda Ward.[42] The Mitchell-Ward relationship itself illuminates centrality of metaphors of the national union more broadly in legitimating love and sexual contact. When Mitchell and Ward imagined their relationship as a marriage, one that they described as "pure" and asexual, they claimed a place for themselves in the narratives by which

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[41] Citizenship, even when secured by birthright in the U.S. context, is a contested category. For a discussion of the tenuousness of citizenship, see Ben Herzog, *Revoking Citizenship: Expatriation in America from the Colonial Era to the War on Terror*, (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

[42] The phrase "the love that dare not speak its name" originates from the Wilde trial prosecution. See Jeff Nunokawa and Amy Sickels, *Oscar Wilde* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005, 91.

the nation was imagined.[43] Afterwards, their claim of marriage-like status prompted concern, and public attention to the spectacle of Lesbian murder shed light on what came to appear a systemic problem. One newspaper, for example, wrote that "the Mitchell-Ward murder has brought to light a number of similar cases of abnormal affection existing between persons of the same sex."[44] Rather than being an isolated spectacle, the murder represented an already emerging trend that helped to consolidate the normal citizen against the deviant. For example, newspapers described a "prototype" to Mitchell and Ward's that had occurred in Memphis some years before. When suggesting that the previous affair was "still fresh in the memory of citizens familiar . . . [with] that dark period," the language of the paper effectively constituted a community of citizens against the shared recollection of a deviant threat.[45]

Later, the Oscar Wilde trial scandalized both sides of the Atlantic in ways that consolidated literary communities against deviance. Newspapers denounced the potential damage to literary prestige that Wilde's transgressive aesthetic invited, celebrated his exile from England, and described "deviants" like Wilde as a new iteration of the fault that "undermined the civilization of the ancient Romans."[46] Joining the fray, Willa Cather famously declared that "Civilization shudders at [Wilde's] name, and there is absolutely no spot on earth where this man can live."[47] The public rejection of Wilde and Mitchell-Ward, among others, thus had an

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[43] Lisa Duggan, "The Trials of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, Sexology, and the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 4 (1993): 791–814, 796.

[44] Qtd. in Duggan," The Trials of Alice Mitchell," 800.

[45] Ibid., 801.

[46] Greg Robinson, "Whispers of the Unspeakable: New York and Montreal Newspaper Coverage of the Oscar Wilde Trials in 1895" *Journal of Transnational American Studies* (6:1) 2015, 16.

[47] Qtd. in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 169.

ancillary role: that of negative instruction, whereby narratives focused not on the specific set of characteristics that delimit desirable citizenship, but illustrate what it is not.[48] In other words, the abnormal sexual subject helps to constitute the memories that coalesce a body of local citizens and communities into a cohesive unit against the threat of a difference within. As attention turned to escalating and diverse iterations of queer sexual contact, the need for a civic response beyond public sensationalism emerged in turn.

Against the backdrop of 1890s sensationalism and criminal prohibition, the first decade of the twentieth century not only evinced new concerns over sexual change but also inaugurated novel regimes for managing, surveilling, and policing the boundaries of acceptable sexual behavior. The anxiety about the new sexual categories that arose as the nineteenth century closed deeply inflected many levels of public policy. These new regulations explicitly targeted sex at the national border, making sexual behavior and the constitution of the national body more closely related. In 1910 the Commissioner-General of the U.S. Bureau of Immigration responded to recent reports on migration trends to the United States with alarm: surveying recent attachments made between male American citizens and their foreign "sweethearts" or "menloves," immigration enforcement officials became increasingly concerned with this "new species of undesirable immigrant . . . for whose exclusion no specific provision had been made."[49] By attaching anxieties over immigration and the growing heterogeneity of U.S. society to changing sexual cultures, the report promotes the development of a regime for excluding sexually deviant figures both foreign and domestic. In the words of U.S. immigration inspector

[48] Carrie Hyde unwinds the complex role of negative instruction in discourses of citizenship, in that it does not instruct what counts as the discrete qualities of a citizen, but brackets those qualities as abstractions that fiction especially can illustrate. See Hyde, *Civic Longings*, 158-59.

[49] Qtd. in Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2009), 20.

Marcus Braun, who prepared a report on potential immigrants from Europe, U.S. "pederasts" and "sodomites" appeared to be traveling to Europe, forming marriage-like couplings with male partners, and importing sexual deviants into the U.S. as resident aliens.[50]

Not only did these couples transgress a national boundary, their marriage-like relationships implied the corruption of the family unit, which itself played a significant role in imagining the future of the state through the relationships, genealogical continuity, and economic investments that marriage sanctioned.[51] The new category of sexual attachment prompted the development of a novel bureaucratic response. As a later report to Congress suggests, prohibition of "traffic of boys and men for amoral purposes" should be met "with even greater rigidity . . . in the case of men" than any other group.[52] The identification of sexual deviance in these reports anticipates the language with which Foucault describes the movement of homosexuality from a "temporary aberration" to become a "species." [53] It also illustrates how the rise of the homosexual as a species intersected with the development of a bureaucracy invested in scrutinizing and categorizing citizens and people subject to U.S. jurisdiction alike. While immigration policy consolidated the image of the ideal citizen as pure, heterosexual, and white, deviations from that formation not only emerged from aliens abroad but also constituted a threat from within.

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[50] Ibid., 20.

[51] For more on the rhetorical role of marriage and the family form since the eighteenth century, see Shirley Samuels, *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). On fantasies of genetic assimilation, see Robert S. Tilton, *Pocahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9-33.

[52] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Importation and Harboring of Women for Immoral Purposes*, 61st Cong., 3rd sess., 1910-1911, S. Doc 753, 86. Accessed online February 2018.

[53] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 43.

Identified as a threat at the borders and from within the confines of the nation alike, queer subjects unexpectedly fell under a regime of scrutiny otherwise reserved for resident aliens and immigrants. In fact, the reports commissioned by Congress in the first decade of the twentieth century speculated on the conditions that might result in the *revocation* of one's citizenship. Though never made policy, immigration reports commissioned by Congress explored the legal precedent in countries from France, Britain, and Hungary in Europe to Brazil, Japan, and Mexico by which citizenship could be curtailed or revoked.[54] Some conditions posited for the withholding of the rights of national membership included prolonged time abroad, a shift in political allegiance, or a threat to the civic body based on some form of deviance. Though the Fourteenth Amendment's protections for birthright citizenship and naturalization were never successfully contested, that outcome may not have appeared certain at the start of the century.[55] To be portrayed as threat to civilization, in that context, took on an unusually charged significance. Moreover, the perceived danger inaugurated the development of institutional procedures for managing this "new species." As this shifting terminology indicates, the definition of the citizen itself did not reconcile or resolve enduring questions about the boundaries, assumptions, and limits by which rights operate in the law and in the civic sphere. Given the rise of an apparatus to police sexuality both within the country and at the nation's borders, the threat of becoming de-naturalized positioned queer people as what Mae Ngai

[54] U.S. Congress, House., Citizenship of the United States, Expatriation, and Protection Abroad, 59th Cong, 2nd sess; 1906, Doc. 326.

[55] Birthright protections regardless of race were established as legal precedent *in United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, 169 U.S. 649 (1898). For more on the interpretations, role, and security of *Wong Kim Ark* in securing racially blind citizenship, see Cristina M. Rodriguez, "The Citizenship Clause, Original Meaning, and the Egalitarian Unity of the Fourteenth Amendment," *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law* 11 (2009): 1363–70; and, Rogers M Smith, "Birthright Citizenship and the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 and 2008," *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law* 11 (2009): 1329–35.

describes as "alien citizens": the category of citizens whose legal rights fall under contestation because of their association with people whose civic status was legally insecure.[56] As queer subjectivity fell under a rigorous regime of state scrutiny during what Margot Canaday calls the "bureaucratization of homosexuality," policing, expatriation, or expulsion from civilization had the potential to become an existential threat.[57]

Narrating Queer Belonging

Fiction proved a vital environment for countering hostile developments in government and politics. In the gap between the legal, rights-bearing subject and these more amorphous forms of citizenship in the political, civic, social, and aspirational realms, literature can perform at least two functions. It can describe the arenas in which the egalitarian promises of citizenship break down in the context of sexuality, and it can also circulate visions of belonging that transcend existing regimes for exclusion, including those being developed in the law and the Federal bureaucracy. Evolutions in public perception of sexuality particularly were often pushed by what literature more generally imagined. As Michael Warner observes, sexuality and gender stand out as categories of membership because they mediate public and private lives in ways that often are circulated through print and media culture.[58] Elsewhere, Hannah Arendt observes that

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[56] Ngai focuses on the lines of racial and national exclusion that were developed in the period from 1924 to the removal of immigration quotas in the 1960s. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 8. See also Yu-Fang Cho, *Uncoupling American Empire: Cultural Politics of Deviance and Unequal Difference 1890-1910* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), esp. 27-51. For an example of developing U.S. regimes for exclusion and deportation, see Sidney Kansas, *U.S. Immigration, Exclusion, and Deportation* (New York: Holland Pub. Co., 1928).

[57] Margot Canaday, *The Straight State*, 4.

[58] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2010), 50.

literature perhaps uniquely negotiates limits in public conceptions of belonging. Particularly isolating the homosexual as an outcast species, Arendt suggests that marginal figures index fiction's capacity to illustrate how subjects otherwise excluded on political and social grounds can be given a subjectivity not afforded in public discourses.[59] The positive capacities of the novel to represent what was unrepresented in political and social life that Arendt and Warner describe, however, exist also in the context of and in tension with the novel's regulatory function. As systems theorist Niklas Luhmann explains, the "modern novel" allowed readers to "observe what the heroes and heroines of the novel could not themselves observe, above all, in a pre-Freudian way, their sexual interests."[60] The observation of sexual desire could, in Luhmann's framework, both invite a recognition of an array of sexual feelings, but also show the danger of their actualization in the social and public spheres. In either case, a consensus emerges in which the novel shapes public conceptions of identity and sexuality by exploring otherwise inarticulate feelings and by shaping those feelings within the emerging fields of power in the political and social spheres alike.

Representing civic membership in a hostile era necessitated the development of indirect strategies for threading ostracized members within an inhospitable narrative environment. As "Time's Citizen's" contends, the connection between sex and the political norms for evaluating civic life was embedded in the very narrative structure of these texts. On the one hand, they challenge the scripts of normative, progressive, time by which major genres of the novel

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[59] For Arendt, novels played a role in documenting emerging subgroups that were left at the fringes of social recognition: in her view, while laborers were the most obvious expression of a cohesive group formed at the social margins, the novel could respond "more subtly in the role assigned to homosexuals" and otherwise "to groups which society had never quite absorbed." Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 197.

[60] Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 133.

stabilized representations of modern life: through reproductive futurity and participation in the growing economy. On the other hand, they confront established expectations of literary narrative structure. Linear progress, kinship across generations, and stable ideological conclusions: these are features that queer narratives contest, trouble, or undermine.[61] Where earlier forms of U.S. literature experimented with non-normative expression, the modern queer novel differs by addressing the dangers of expressing queer affiliation in the context of the modern sexual binary and growing hostility to sexual difference. For example, though the early American short story could innovate because it was not "dedicated to creating long normalizing narratives," as Christopher Looby posits, queer expression after the emergence of the modern sexual binary operated in more elusive ways.[62] In the context of the modern sexual binary, such expression navigated the desire for queer people to be acknowledged as civil subjects while also encoding queerness itself within familiar forms so as to avoid public sanction without becoming entirely invisible.

The tension between a wish for civic recognition and the reality of visibility's threats prompted queer authors to push the narrative strategies of novels towards new subtleties. Functioning within the generic restrictions of the bourgeois novel, queer novels resist normalization by granting psychological access to experiences of deviance and temporal non-alignment with contemporary bourgeois life, family, and economy. As such, novels provided an important site for envisioning changes in the body politic. In narratological theory, novels especially hold a privileged status for how they manage competing political views. For Paul

[61] For an assessment the way that queer novels conflict with standardized temporal narratives, see Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[62] Christopher Looby, ed., *"The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman" and Other Queer Nineteenth Century Short Stories* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), ix.

Ricoeur, the novel is a "privileged instrument" because of its capacity to "explore and bring to language this divorce between worldviews."[63] That process of inhabiting a split in worldviews comprises one of the strategies for queer representation that these authors deploy. Inconsistencies in retrospective narration, leaps into the melodramatic mode, and interpolated tales rehabilitating lost queer connections: these features, among others, allow for indirect access to queer thought and feeling. While heterosexuality became the hegemonic standard, the novels in "Times Citizens" posit narratives of queer belonging that could be threaded within the existing mechanisms of the civic order, rather than being imagined as diametrically opposed to national progress, social adaptation, and civilizational development. Given the rising public hostility to sexual difference, not all novels approached heterosexual hegemony evenly. Together, however, these novels complicate, resist, or undermine the rhetorical entrenchment of the neutral, heterosexual citizen and posited alternative modes of civic and social being that did not always necessitate conformity within the state.

Viewing the queer novelistic imaginary in this manner brings a new perspective to the way we understand the evolving voice and language through which the sexual binary was expressed and complicated. Describing the binary, Michel Foucault suggests that homosexuality as a category began to speak publicly by reappropriating the medical language through which queer people were pathologized. Since then, queer scholarship has emphasized queer anti-normativity, or the process of rejecting civic standards for acceptable behavior worthy of state recognition and defense, as a primary interpretive practice.[64] Viewing the novel as a signal realm

[63] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 89, 107.

[64] For an additional discussion of queer critiques of the antinormative thesis, see, for example, Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson, "Introduction: Antinormitivity's Queer Conventions," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26, no. 1 (2015): 1–25.

for contesting language of exclusion allows us to reevaluate how queer figures began to "demand [their] own legitimacy" using the very language that diagnosed their otherness.[65]

Where Foucault discusses the outsized role of medical discourses in that language, the novels of my study offer alternatives. They view queerness as a mode of identification related not inimical to civic structures and local politics; they deploy the novel to explore exclusivity marked by the language of the citizen, alien, subject, and person. Fiction as a forum provided unique opportunities because of what queer figures could imagine in light of the way public and institutions discussed their difference. Rather than carving out a separate sphere for queer being, these texts sought relations to both national membership and the symbolism of citizenship. These relations, however, are not predicated on conformity; rather, they resist the heteronormative default while not accepting the terms of exile through which many critics of late have recovered a genealogy of queer politics. When those relationships fail to materialize, these novels attempted to understand the role of narrow visions of civic and national membership in causing and shaping the negative affects that shape modern queer life.

Beyond Opting Out: Politics, Queer Theory, and the Limits of Rights

The political engagement envisioned by the texts in "Time's Citizens" offers a different vision of queer politics than that advanced by current trends in queer theory. In the consensus amongst the majority of queer scholars, one of the defining characteristics of queer thought is the choice, as Mari Ruti puts it, to "opt out" of the very features of civic life that have proven largely hostile to queer culture.[66] Opting out from the marital, reproductive, and economic participation

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[65] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 101.

[66] Mari Ruti, *The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory's Defiant Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

assumed for heterosexual life, as these scholars suggest, invites queer figures to imagine other futurities than those offered by discourses that proffer marriage, child-rearing, and middle-class economic life as the best expression of civic membership and the best method for securing national growth. Since Leo Bersani and Michael Warner documented the radical rejection of normative life that queerness implies, however, mainstream LGBT politics has instead advocated for assimilation within the very structures from which queers were excluded.[67] Against this trend, Lee Edelman suggests that queerness "can never define an identity; it can only disturb one" by opposing normative and institutional recognition.[68] In concert, many queer theorists suggest that queers should celebrate their role in the destruction of norms and in reviled practices rather than engaging with a damaging political world.

Disagreements over the priorities of queer theory's politics have proved polarizing. Some critics, for example, take issue with Edelman's thesis that queer subjects are only oriented by the death drive, the rejection of reproductive futurity, and are always and forever situated against the social order that defines queerness and abjection as the same. In response, José Esteban Muñoz writes that he and other queer theorists advance a "project that depends on critical practices that stave off the failures of imagination in queer critique."[69] Instead of the death drive, Muñoz reaches for a hope that, as he says, is "spawned of a critical investment in utopia that is

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[67] For more on queer theory, anti-assimilation, and radical queer politics, see Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," *October* 43 (1987): 197–222; Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[68] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 17.

[69] See Robert L. Caserio et al., "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (May 2006): 819–28, 826.

profoundly resistant to the stultifying logic of a broken-down present."[70] In concert, Heather Love explores the way in which a strain of literature in the aftermath of the sexual binary archived queer feelings by looking backward to a simpler time before the categorizations of sexual feeling by the modern state. For Love, the feelings of backwardness, shame, negativity, and depression that are often associated with queer life allow us to properly see "the persistence of the past in the present."[71] Understanding those feelings and their orchestration, she explains, allows us to reach "towards alternative trajectories for the future" that advocate for queer subjectivity through an awareness of the past.[72] There are limits, however, in the way these forms of queer theory separate the distant past and the distant future from the timelines we inhabit. While both Love and Muñoz wish to avoid the normalizing influences often required by a politics of inclusion, they advance forms of political engagement that reach towards a radically new mode for queer life promised for some undisclosed future, a future that sometimes can seem out of reach.

"Time's Citizens" does not suggest an approach that invests in rights-based discourses blindly or that views liberal-democratic frameworks as the end-game for queer life. Rather, it seeks to open a more nuanced view of the history of activism and to explore how, in a moment of crisis, queers engaged with rather than rejected the terms of the politics that surrounded them. There are many precedents by which queer social and cultural innovations open spaces for imagining broader, coalitional forms of subjectivity that did not adhere to contemporaneous

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[70] Ibid., 826. Afterwards, Muñoz defined queerness as a "not yet here"—a reflection on the past through which a better future is made possible. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

[71] Love, *Feeling Backward*, 29.

[72] Ibid., 29.

social strictures. Neither, however, were these visions withheld for a far distant future. Modern queer culture, in fact, depends on innovations that were by no means obvious in their time, innovations that disturbed the social order beyond the realm of sexuality. The most innovative aspects of modern queer culture's resistance to assimilation include experimentation across lines of race, ethnicity and nation, use of a lexicon of coded symbols and language, and association with cultural novelty and aestheticism, among others. These innovations provide pathways for more inclusive politics that resonate now as much as ever. Indeed, the adoption of and association with non-citizen deviance deeply structured queer life in ways celebrate cultural cross-fertilization and resistance to hegemonic cultural standards. Alongside George Chauncey, Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons detail how sexual subcultures in New York and Los Angeles developed a discourse, language, and performative set of practices based on the places in which queers found spaces to experiment in forms of social expression that were not condoned by proper society and were concealed totally from public expression by police scrutiny.[73] These spaces, as Christopher Nealon suggests, often imagined queerness not just as a species but as a quasi-ethnicity and form of cultural identification, which offered a pathway to recognition of queer personhood and its attendant promises and dangers. The development of queer practices, cultural histories, kinship, and geographies ultimately helped to lay groundwork for the personhood requisite for civic inclusion in U.S. law.[74] The bureaucratic conflation of queers with dangers from abroad, in this sense, was repurposed by queers to form a sense of their own

[73] See George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), and Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000).

[74] Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall*, (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001), 2.

elusive subjectivity, even if that association also invoked material threats. These developments, though markers of isolation at the time, play a substantial role in future approaches to queer inclusion based on the cultural characteristics of LGBT life.

When it comes to offering a positive model of rights in the face of these material histories and legal legacies, the more negatively inflected critiques of assimilationist politics come up short. What does it mean, in this light, to posit other forms of queer sociality that do not necessitate conformity with the sanitized institutions of the state? Though queers appeared largely on the margins, the queer texts discussed in “Time’s Citizens” do not disengage with hostile tendencies in the public sphere in ways that Love and Muñoz have described. Instead, they addressed a narrower time-horizon of change: they enfolded the terms of exclusion and the legal rationale by which queer expression was threatened into their structural approach and tried to imagine pathways towards a more equitable politics. “Time’s Citizens” claims that the novel was uniquely positioned to register the political and legal stakes of queer difference because of its ability to reckon with material realities while remaining analogous and ephemerally related to lived social and civic experience. In the face of a system that was in the process of becoming, but had not yet become, overwhelmingly hostile to queer subjects, the novels of this project attempt to carve a space for the queer subject that is predicated on having agency without capitulating to increasingly hostile and elaborate state regimes for categorization and control.

To imagine the concrete practices for near-term social change in which rights-negotiations play a role requires consideration that has not been fully thought through in more radical declarations of queer politics. It is, in fact, a model that queer people explored, if haltingly, in a more uncertain time. This brings us to a conundrum, which is at the heart of citizenship itself, concerning the limitations of the liberal, rights-based model to recognize,

foster, and protect multiple forms of social subjectivity. Queer theory especially forces us to think about that tension between the present and the aspirational that positions citizenship as an offering and a limitation. But the possibilities for activism in the territory separating radical queerness from complacent assimilation should motivate us to reconsider the limits of our theory to live up to its ideals as much as the failure of our civil society to enact the equal rights whose rhetoric saturates our public sphere but in practice seems ever more precarious. That aspirational gesture has more in common with the way belonging, membership, and inclusion have been narrated, especially in literature that contended with real-time social and legal developments. Looking back, the hope for and fear of membership formed a dialogue by which queers could demand their legitimacy using the very political and legal language of their oppression. Beginning to speak for themselves was not merely a social declaration of presence—but a contention and engagement with the political and legal discourses themselves that reified queer difference. To claim their own desires, some queer fiction acknowledged the messiness of these negotiations and, in so doing, provided a model for conceiving queer agency even in the face of radical danger.

Chapters

Each chapter examines how fiction addresses the relationship among citizenship, the law, and the politics of a progressive future, a contentious present, or the archives of the past. The first chapter, "Their Own Times and Places: Narrative Time and the Construction of the Queer Citizen in Henry James' *The Bostonians*" argues that the novel's protagonist, the feminist activist Olive Chancellor, models a form of civic membership for queer subjects that proposes a new horizon beyond the normative sexuality positioned at the heart of desirable citizenship. James

begins with a psychological portrait as he introduces Olive to Verena and builds the prospects of their intimacy, but he later unravels this intimacy in the course of a plot culminating in Verena's marriage. Through this split, *The Bostonians* pits the novelty of Olive's queer love against the more parochial norms of marriage and public citizenship that Olive wishes to overturn. In the conflict between the two frames, James contrasts Olive's queer future with the intransigent realities of mainstream politics and presents her as a potential antidote.

Chapter two, "A Deceitfully Permanent Present: Realism and the Limits of Reproductive Futurity in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*," focuses on the decentering of the normative, white, middle-class family. William Dean Howells documents the connection between familial strife and national economic stagnation by showing how labor unrest and inequality destabilize the privileges of the Marches, a bourgeois family recently relocated from Boston to New York. By interrupting the hold of the Marches on housing, economic security, and the assurances of reproductive future, Howells undermines the thesis that social progress depends on the homogeneous heterosexual unit. This chapter shows how Howells's novel about normative life critiques fiction's role in stabilizing political membership around heterosexuality and the futurity of offspring.

The third chapter, "Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* and the Racialization of Progress," extends the critique of heterosexual futurity by illuminating the racially exclusive basis of progressive narratives, and by offering queerness as a mode of political transcendence. Chapter three suggests that Chesnutt's novel illustrates the primacy and security that the white child holds in the nation's political imagination. Chesnutt observes how reproductive futurity circulates a vision of family and national progress that maintains and extends the exclusion of black families from the fullness of postbellum citizenship. As an antidote to racial erasure,

Chesnutt concludes his novel with a queer interracial affiliation between the novel's primary male characters. Overall, Chapter three argues that he replaces heterosexuality and the white child with a queer form of kinship that redirects the futurity of U.S. politics away from the white child and the heterosexual couple.

Considering Willa Cather, the fourth chapter exposes how an emergent queer imaginary diminished Chesnutt's hopeful gesture and instead protected queer white privilege by emphasizing nativity, whiteness, and racially exclusive U.S. citizenship. "Queer Backwardness and the Nativist Impulse: The Case of Willa Cather" unpacks how Cather emphasizes racial exclusion by depicting queer affiliations between white men that harken back to a national imaginary in which racially restricted citizenship was unquestioned. The chapter begins with Cather's early short fiction to explore the vision of nativist citizenship that persists through her work, before turning to *The Professor's House* to show how queerness and nativism intersect in Tom Outland's fetishization of tribal relics in New Mexico. *The Professor's House*, chapter four argues, complicates queer nostalgia by constructing that imaginary on a racially exclusive basis.

The final chapter explores expatriation as a liberation from the racist, antifeminist regimes that particularly inhibit queer, black, feminist expression in the U.S. "Expatriate Longings: Finding Queerness Elsewhere in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and *Passing*" details how Larsen's novels *Quicksand* and *Passing* chart transnational modes of resistance. *Quicksand* associates Helga Crane's transatlantic displacement with moments of unspoken feeling between women who feel threatened by marriages with men. *Passing's* feelings of attachment depend upon representations that frame queerness as alien or outside the nation. In her approach, Larsen references a tradition from Frederick Douglass to Pauline Hopkins that deploys a rhetorical contrast between the alien and the citizen. Ultimately, the chapter claims that Larsen deploys

racial and gendered difference to suggest that queerness, gender, and race might not be reconciled with the U.S. state.

Through and against the promise of a more perfect union, the authors and texts of "Time's Citizens" show the limits and failures of the terms on which the nation's progress was predicated. Along the way, they hold the possibility of equity in mind, even while reaching beyond the trajectory imagined in the nation's traditions. Understanding that trajectory even as it was being shaped remains a continuing, and imperative, project. After all, as legal historian Katherine Franke writes, we are inevitably "shaped by the rights [we] bear" in ways that reach back to the frameworks inaugurated and the confusion of laws past.[75] To fit into existing rights frameworks, in other words, has constraints and consequences. "Time's Citizens" suggests that we continue to have something to learn about the enduring process of seeing, narrating, and shaping the rights through which we inhabit the nation and world through novels from the early moments of modern queer expression. In their way, queer subjects across the period examined in "Time's Citizens" see opportunities for recognition and demonstrate the limits of engagement. Those opportunities and limits prove instructive for understanding the way that the subjecthood, personhood, and citizenship of queer subjects has unfolded. There are more options, as they show, than either capitulating to or rejecting outright the norms of the modern sexual binary. The process of negotiation was always messy. Amid that messiness, however, queer authors offer us a model of political engagement that critiques, without abandoning, the rights protections through which our politics largely are shaped. In the uncertainty now faced by queer people and a wide array of minoritized communities in a moment of populist, regressive politics, the ambiguity that these forebears inhabit appears more relevant and instructive than ever.

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[75] Katherine Franke, *Wedlocked: The Perils of Marriage Equality* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 13.

Chapter 1

Their Own Times and Places: Narrative Time and the Construction of the Queer Citizen in Henry James' The Bostonians

> *It was notorious that great beauties, great geniuses, great characters, take their own times and places for coming into the world, leaving the gaping spectators to make them "fit in" and holding from far-off ancestors, or even, perhaps, straight from the divine generosity, much more than from their ugly or stupid progenitors. They were incalculable phenomena.*[1]
> — Olive Chancellor, *The Bostonians*
>
> *There is never time in the future in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment; the time is always now.*[2]
> —James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*

An animating drama in Henry James' 1886 novel, *The Bostonians*, concerns the unmarriageability chosen by its protagonist, Olive Chancellor. James picked an odd time to place such a character: set during the end of Federal Reconstruction in the 1870s, *The Bostonians* diverges from trends in period novels that symbolized national reconciliation through marriage. Instead, James narrates a conflict between Olive, a wealthy Boston women's rights advocate and former abolitionist, and her cousin Basil Ransom, a socially conservative Mississippian and Confederate veteran. Basil suggests that their disagreement concerns how Olive's program for women's independence extends beyond the political rights Olive hopes to expand in the postbellum political order. He does so with a provocation: when musing over the "emancipation

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[1] Henry James, *The Bostonians* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 90. Subsequently cited parenthetically in main text.

[2] James Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, The Library of America 98 (New York: Library of America, 1998), 215.

of Olive Chancellor's sex" in one of his most infamous proclamations, Basil asks "what sex was it, great heaven" that his cousin hopes to liberate? (257). His question about what constitutes Olive's "emancipated" sex implies that she represents a new class of women, a condition exacerbated by the description of her sexual status as an "old maid" and "essentially a celibate" (6). In the question, Basil also implies that the liberation of Olive's type also has the potential to inaugurate broader changes in the U.S. social body. James threads these two dimensions of change, the new sexual class Olive represents and the social change she seeks, closely together throughout the novel's plot progression. In one dimension of the novel's plot, Olive builds a case for women's rights through a network of former abolitionists in Boston; the development of Olive's program coincides with her budding intimacy with Verena Tarrant, who acts as her public voice. By contrast, Basil advocates a traditional role for women and attempts to woo and save Verena from what he views as the shame of association with Olive's radical feminism. Beyond his interest in Verena, however, the emancipation Basil fears from Olive's work prompts an anxiety over the new sexual subjects he claims Olive has "invented," and a regressive need to curtail their recognition (262). In a perverse echo of abolition and postbellum civil rights, sex-type and citizenship merge in Basil's worry that the strange species of Olive's sex will broaden beyond granting women equal rights: it could change their sex into something unknown, and the political landscape along with it.

The novel definitively circulates confusion around Olive's identification: though James' narrator describes her as a "signal old maid" despite being in her early twenties, subsequently he characterizes her relationship with Verena as a "union" and a "partnership" whose goal is to expand the civil rights of women, giving the relationship an aura of legitimacy (16, 130). Such terminological flexibility places the sexual difference implied by the two women and their

mutual rejection of opposite-sex marriage at the center of a potential renegotiation of U.S. civic life. Given recent critical treatment by literary scholars of Olive as a litmus test for U.S. developments in what Michel Foucault calls the speciation of sexuality, Basil's concern over novelty and sexual invention has an element of prescience.[3] For critics, these aspects of Olive's characterization present a related categorical problem: how might she fit into a pantheon of queer representation that emerged alongside the sexual binary? Benjamin Kahan proposes that the celibate provides key insights into understanding the role of Olive's sexual subjectivity for being both a discrete category and a sexual choice.[4] In a similar vein, Peter Coviello offers Olive as an "emergent" figure who makes subsequent queer figures legible.[5] Such readings identify the characteristics of Olive's difference—her status as an old maid, her unmarriagability, her straying from the normative institutions of the day—in order to understand the contours of queer expression during a paradigm shift in their public visibility and categorization.[6]

The radical potential offered by such deviation from normativity as Olive offers was hardly lost on James. By his own admission, he believed the changing perceptions of public sexuality to be one of the signal issues of the time. When summarizing his novel to his editor, J.R. Osgood, James declares that his intention was to explore "the most salient and peculiar point

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[3] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol.1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43.

[4] Benjamin Kahan, *Celibacies: American Modernism and Sexual Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). I will engage Kahan more directly later in this chapter.

[5] Peter Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America*, America and the Long 19th Century (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 171.

[6] For more on the rise of reunion romance as a mode of fiction that circulated the marriage form, see Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000) and Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

of our social life," which he describes as "the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf."[7] As James explains, the content of his novel did not shy away from controversy, but courted it in the object he chose to study: "the relation of two girls" who emblematize "those friendships between women which are so common in New England."[8] Through this emphasis on the famed arrangement of what would later be termed 'Boston marriages,' James claims the topic of sexual rights and sexual perception as carefully chosen components of his literary project.[9] His objective, however, is broader than just depicting new civil subjects: it concerns the lineages of their activism and the social and political headwinds they might face. When elaborating that he aims to depict "for the most part persons of the radically reforming type, who are especially interested in the emancipation of women, giving them the suffrage, [and] releasing them from bondage," James embeds his novel's approach to sexual typology in a longer, fraught tradition of activist change.[10] Framing his novel's topic as regarding the bondage of women and an attempt at radical reform situates the novel's discourse in a tradition of activism and reform that was fading from prominence. As such, he situates the failed attempt at extending political rights to women in the genealogy of U.S. civil rights negotiations that lead to collapse of Republican control of the South and the arrival of Jim Crow

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[7] Henry James, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 47.

[8] Ibid., 47.

[9] Lillian Faderman's essay "Nineteenth Century Boston marriage as a possible lesson for today" contains the origins of the term Lesbian in the 1870s and the possibilities of gay desire (and sex) in the late-century. See *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships among Contemporary Lesbians,* ed. Esther D. Rothblum and Kathleen A. Brehony, (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1993), especially 30-40. This collection on the whole is mainly interested in twentieth century sexuality, though it bases many of these conversations in the necessity or superfluity of genital sexual contact in the origins of Boston marriages from the advent of the category around the 1870s and onward.

[10] James, *Notebooks*, 47.

segregation. In such a relation, James indicates that "sentiment of sex" and political conflict, via women's agitation for the vote and for equal rights, are deeply interwoven, but also that the outcomes for reform were difficult to envision. More than merely depicting the rise of a new identity, James' choice of topic tries to comprehend broader uncertainties concerning U.S. civil rights and their application to shifting categories of national subjects.

In this light, James has another game afoot than defining new political and sexual types such as Olive, one less recognized by recent critics. His project is to understand the trends of discourses around new civil subjects by navigating differing narrative attitudes towards the presence of such queer people as Olive in the civic body. My concern in this chapter lies here: in James' management of narrative perspectives towards Olive's strangeness and how they may illuminate the rise of sexuality as a concern in U.S. civil society. Following Paul Ricoeur's sense that fiction's attention to shifting perspectives makes it the "privileged instrument for investigating the human psyche," I explore how James' narrative structure shapes reader's perceptions of Olive's novelty—both its offerings and its threats.[11] Queer expression, to be sure, formatively contributes to the U.S. literary imagination across the nineteenth century, such that the queerness of the text is itself not necessarily novel.[12] In this field, *The Bostonians* stands out by embedding the discovery of Olive's queerness in the visible political process itself: it positions Olive as a barometer for an intensifying conflict in U.S. literary rhetoric between civic progress (normative, heterosexual) and civic threat (deviant, backwards, anti-heterosexual). This is where a narratological reading adds nuance: by situating readers within the shifting attitudes to

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[11] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 98.

[12] *"The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman" and Other Queer Nineteenth-Century Short Stories,* ed. Christopher Looby (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), viii-ix

Olive that James depicts. In this narrative strategy, the novel illustrates how the rise of heteronormativity shaped queer self-perception in its fierce public resistance to sexual deviance. Where many critics question the antinormative thesis in queer theory—by which queers shape their subjectivity as the inverse of fixed public norms—Olive offers a converse possibility.[13] She provides an incomplete vision of queer activism's ability to shape the discourses that positioned sexual deviance against, and state-endorsed normativity constituent of national progress.

At one level, the novel's view of Olive coalesces around her non-normative position—she is at once a "spinster" and "so essentially a celibate" that Ransom finds "himself thinking of her as old" when, in fact, the narrator admits "her years were fewer" than Ransoms (16).[14] But the novel also describes Olive as at the cusp of something that can only be recognized retrospectively: when reflecting on what she and Verena might contribute, Olive claims that "geniuses" like Verena "take their own times and places for coming into the world, leaving the gaping spectators to make them ' fit in'" (90). Olive, at once a gaping spectator and at the same time the agent seeking to 'fit' Verena to a public role, straddles the position of an outsider and an agent in the political change for women's rights that she wishes to realize socially and legislatively. As such, James makes two moves with regard to Olive and her supposed deviance. At first glance, he stacks the deck against her: his novel opens with the narrator's denigration of Olive and an apparent sympathy with Basil on account of Olive's radical gender politics. As we find, however, negative assessments of Olive's sexual and civic life are asymmetrically mediated

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[13] For an expansive examination of the *de rigueur* role of antinormativity in queer critique, see Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson, "Introduction: Antinormitivity's Queer Conventions," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26.1 (2015): 1–25.

[14] See Benjamin Kahan's account for the role of celibacy in defining Olive's positionality and its relationship to sexual life in this period. He suggests that celibacy "striates the long history of homosexuality before its emergence as such" See Benjamin Kahan, *Celibacies*, 33-42.

through his narrator: early on, while "confiding" Olive's "occult" characteristics to the reader and suggesting they remove her from public sympathy, the narrator conversely suggests Basil had the potential to be "an American statesman" despite his "provincial" attitudes, deportment, and service in the Confederate Army (9, 6, 149).[15] Furthermore, James's narrator objects to Olive being "old" because she is "essentially a celibate," placing her in opposition to the progressive, marital time Basil defends (16). When defining Olive as outside a heterosexual economy, James exposes how the narrator's antipathy to Olive originates from the view that her sexual subjectivity threatens the norms of civic participation, necessitating her exclusion.

The narrator's alignment with Basil, however, is not static. In fact, over the course of the novel, these prejudices undergo a subtle but significant and understudied shift. In contrast to his early criticism of Olive, towards the center of the text, the narrator later frames Olive's advocacy for "new social horizons" as being on the *avant garde* of civic and sexual expression and reframes Basil as "in social and political views, a reactionary" due to his advocacy for traditional gender roles (149). When Olive overcomes her fear of public speaking and addresses the Boston public, the narrator suggests Olive's potential for an activist future, leaving Basil to his antiquated gender politics. These frames compete, one emphasizing the deviance of sexual difference and the need to limit women's rights, the other offering Olive as an agent of political advancement who emerges from*,* not despite, her queer history.[16] Between the two, James

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[15] Olive and Basil have restrictions on their citizenship, making the narrator's comment here telling: Olive due to gender, Basil due to a 14th Amendment prohibition on Confederate soldiers like Basil from holding public office. See U.S. Const. amend. XIV. Sec. 3.

[16] I follow the tension in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of queerness as both "relational" and historically contextualized. While describing queerness as a "continuing moment, movement, motive," she claims that ignoring the historical limits on non-heterosexual expression would "dematerialize any possibility of queerness itself." See Sedgwick's *Tendencies*, (xii, 8).

situates readers as participants in the prejudice that makes Olive's queerness a threat—even while intimating Olive's radical potential.[17] When defining Olive as outside a heterosexual economy, James exposes how the narrator's antipathy to Olive originates from the view that her sexual subjectivity threatens the norms of civic participation. By tilting the prospects of civic membership towards Basil, the narrator inflects how readers receive opposing conceptualizations of sexual and civic progress and retrospectively disallows queer voices because they exist outside normative time and institutions.[18]

Examining how *The Bostonians* reflects on a critical moment in both the history of sexuality and of U.S. regimes for regulating social and sexual life has broader implications for current debates around the politics of queer theory. I position Olive as a character who gestures towards a radical future and a horizon for political change; yet Olive is also a character whose novelty *The Bostonians'* narration resists. As such, the queer future that Olive invokes faces significant opposition when placed in the context of marital normalcy and traditionalists like Basil. These two differential draws, which compete in the novel, complicate the primary ways in which queer theory of late has read activist time. Lee Edelman and Heather Love, for example, posit that the queer rejection of normative futurity sits at the core of a queer political agitation. They suggest that we can uncover queer affects in a backwards gaze to a time before modern sexology or that we find queer agency in the embrace of death drive and the rejection of what

[17] For a helpful discussion of the evolution of James' authorial erasure and its context, see Barbara Hochman, "Disappearing Authors and Resentful Readers in Late-Nineteenth Century American Fiction: The Case of Henry James," *ELH* 63.1 (Spring 1996): 177–201.
[18] When describing Basil's view of Olive as a "signal old maid," the free indirect discourse defers reminders that the opinions are Basil's and not the narrator's. The narrator writes: "He did not dislike her" but that "she gave him an uneasy feeling" and drops into a third person account of Olive's qualities that is from Basil's focalization, but with few markings that the opinions are his (16).

Edelman terms reproductive futurity.[19] There is an echo of these theses in Olive Chancellor's unstable relation to heterosexual narratives of progressive time through her "unmarriageable" celibacy and presumed age. Yet, to be outside of reproductive time is not to be outside of the future itself in the novel's depiction: in fact, it is only to Basil Ransom and an unkind narrator that Olive appears antagonistic to normative narratives of sexual or social futurity. Such readings demand that readers suppress Olive's dedication to "the coming of a better day," and her investment in the possible futures of social change into an internalized homophobia (16). Recovering the way in which James situates Olive's oddness as an exponent of prejudice against sexual difference allows for the reconsideration of Olive as a gesture towards a more inclusive political future. But this gesture is limited one: though forcing readers to contend with prejudice, James also shows the failure of liberal democracy to accommodate radical visions of social and civic change.

In this chapter, I illustrate how *The Bostonians* marks a transition point in the U.S. representation of civil belonging in which queer civic presence was briefly possible. By situating Olive as at once an "old maid" and at the cusp of "new social horizons," James puts pressure on the rhetoric that accrued progressiveness around heterosexuality and implied that queers were anti-progressive, backwards, or merely oriented against the reproductive family. Instead, he charts Olive's vision of an inclusive civic future and addresses prejudicial readers who label Olive as a drag on social progress. To illuminate this development, I trace the way in which James revises her portrayal through proleptic interventions by the narrator and marks Olive's

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[19] Edelman situates the queer resistance of "reproductive futurity" as at the center of the radical politics of queer difference. Heather Love discusses the debilitating effects of living with the modern sexual binary during its advent and how queers reached back to a simpler past. See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4; Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 7.

temporality at odds with public time. As I show, the narrator's retrospective framing of Basil's opinions in free indirect discourse asymmetrically privileges Basil's negative assessments of Olive, creating a tenuous imbalance toward Basil's point of view in what otherwise appears to be a neutral narration. Focusing on narratorial revisionism, I show the subtext behind Olive's denigrated queerness and the figuration of her relationship and politics as failures. Next, I show how the marriage plot that unwinds Olive and Verena's intimacy enforces a normative time that splits the novel's narrative temporality. Finally, I contend that Olive overcomes the regressive politics of Basil's heteronormative time by emerging as a public figure in her own right. As I suggest, *The Bostonians* resists the coming into hegemony of a sexual system that enforced a standard of romantic and sexual being and offers Olive as an agent of change in a social and literary system that effaced competing concepts of sexual citizenship.[20]

1. Constructing Odd Olive

From the first sentences of *The Bostonians*, James' narrator emphasizes that Olive's relation to normative social time is strange at best. James embeds his narrator's critique strategically: when he voices Mrs. Luna's opinion of her sister Olive to an unnamed auditor, whom we soon learn to be Basil Ransom, he begins by isolating her difference from the point of view of Olive's peers, who see Olive as out of step with normative time. Mrs. Luna reports: "Olive will come down in about ten minutes; she told me to tell you that. About ten; that is exactly like Olive. Neither five nor fifteen, and yet not ten exactly, but either nine or eleven" (5). By describing Olive as intentional in the way she is inexact in her attention to time, Mrs. Luna

[20] Brenda Cossman describes sexual citizenship as "a set of rights and practices denoting membership and belonging in a nation state." *Sexual Citizens: The Legal and Cultural Regulation of Sex and Belonging* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007), 5.

implies that Olive eschew common intervals, such as "five or fifteen" minutes in favor of her own rubric—the numerically odd "nine or eleven." These deviations from expected temporal indices figure Olive as resisting what she views as normalized social procedures because of her deviation from Mrs. Luna's conception of normal social time. Before James names Olive's odd, celibate, and old difference, he attributes her queerness to her purposeful suspension of public time.

Though the narrator contains these initial critiques in Mrs. Luna's words and Basil's focalization, the narrator himself seems to agree: Olive's antagonists follow a socially expected rubric, in which the narrator marks their time with units such as the five, ten or fifteen minutes that Olive specifically avoids. The narratorial observation of Olive's difference from normative social time is ubiquitous. Upon their first encounter, Basil notes that until "five minutes" prior he hadn't known Olive, placing his own time frame in alignment with Mrs. Luna's normative metrics (8). Subsequently, attaching normative notations to a source of desire, Basil's first observation of Verena Tarrant describes her as "the pretty one, whom he had only noticed during the last ten minutes" (36). For Basil Ransom, Verena's beauty is also attached to a time frame at odds with Olive's chosen metric. Even considering Verena's first appearance as a public speaker, Mrs. Farrinder, Olive's competition for control of the women's equality movement, can only view Verena in terms of a rubric that Olive refuses. Listening to Verena's first public appearance, Mrs. Farrinder notes that she had "heard of these things in detail only ten minutes before," suggesting that the way to understand Verena and her potential for the suffrage movement is through a normative frame (44). By presenting Olive's difference as structural oddity in her interaction with social time, James' narrator prefaces his suggestion that Olive's difference originates in the social positions that she might inhabit by conforming to or rejecting

marriage. According to the narrator, Olive's time is explicitly political in its non-normativity: she sees beyond social and civic structures, and imbeds her difference at the habitual level, making the arbitrariness of normativity visible.

The political inflections of Olive's opposition to social norms emerges from the structure through which James inserts those ascriptions in the first place: a narratorial strategy that shades Olive and Verena's meeting with the unkind perspective of Basil's future opinion.[21] This strategy intersects with a split in *The Bostonians'* narrative time into two distinct temporalities that contrast the initial representation of Olive and Verena's partnership with the plot that undoes their intimacy. In the beginning, James suspends the narrative over the duration of a few days, marking its progression through the ten-minute increments that represent the normal frame Olive resists. Later, in a plot covering the subsequent years after Olive and Verena's encounter, he narrates the dissolution of their intimacy and partnership. William James attested that the first chapters made him feel that "so slow a thing had ne'er been writ," but also that they "establish the relationship between Olive and Verena" in a psychologically intimate space of slowed time.[22] Noticing a similar characteristic in the novel's initial stage, one London reviewer found that the novel is "too full of *longueurs,* full of overelaborate and alembicated passages," and is almost inexplicable in its "length and lack of adventure."[23] For both, the novel suffers for its slowness, and moreover, for its failure to assemble a compelling, forward-driving plot.

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[21] For a discussion of the feminist and sexual politics of the novel, especially how Basil Ransom is the primary critic of Olive and Verena's social-sexual difference, see Judith L. Sensibar, "The Politics of Hysteria in *The Bostonians*," *South Central Review* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 57–72.

[22] From an 1886 letter from William to Henry James; quoted in F. O. Matthiessen's *The James Family: Including Selections from the Writings of Henry James, Senior, William James, and Alice James* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 328.

[23] Kevin J. Hayes, ed., *Henry James: The Contemporary Reviews*, The American Critical Archives 7 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 153.

When the novel later shifts from the psychological intimacy William James describes to a multi-year plot, the slow pace in which Olive and Verena build psychological intimacy is replaced with a plot that, if not necessarily adventurous, accelerates towards the dissolution of Olive and Verena's partnership. These two temporalities constitute what Alfred Habegger identified as an "appallingly pervasive cleavage" in the novel's narrative structure.[24] More recently, Rachel Ihara claims that the slow initial section works against the serialized form of the novel, suspending readers in time and place, and forcing them "to allow the characters and situation to emerge over time," leaving them suspended without the guidance of a clear narratorial point of view.[25] The split in formal approach signifies two different temporalities in competition: one almost episodic section in which queer intimacy is available and formational, and another in which the standards of a marriage plot, a dominating form of the postbellum novel, destabilize those queer feelings.[26]

As William James recognized, the novel's strangeness is a temporal question: writing his brother, James suggests that the "suspense of narrative" in the initial section provides ample space for the narrator to intercede in the novel's initial frame, revising opinions and attitudes.[27]

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[24] Alfred Habegger, "The Disunity of *The Bostonians*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 24, no. 2 (September 1969): 193–209, 194.

[25] Rachel Ihara, "'Rather Rude Jolts': Henry James, Serial Novels, and the Art of Fiction," *The Henry James Review* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 188–206, 192.

[26] Janet Gabler observes that the novel's narrative style establishes narrative distance in the text. She writes: "James's apparent narrative disunity is not disunity at all, but different manifestations of the same conscious narrative personality predictably reacting to different central narrative plotting problems in the novel." Gabler's interests are more aesthetic than mine and do not dwell on the political implications of this distance. See Gabler, "The Narrator's Script: James's Complex Narration in *The Bostonians*," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 14, no. 2 (1984) 94-109, 96.

[27] William James and Henry James, *The Letters of William James* (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920), 250.

Moreover, as James observed, that suspense was amplified by the novel's serialized publishing schedule, which "let the relationship between Olive and Verena grow" for readers in the "vacant months" between publications, such that the narrative's own distension intersects and the conditions of its publishing in amplify their initial intimate space.[28] Yet, that space where Olive and Verena build their intimacy abounds in retrospective revisions that interject negative assessments of their relations as abnormal. The perception of oddness that James emphasizes in the first paragraph of the novel was not immediately apparent upon Basil and Olive's initial contact. When Basil Ransom first encounters Olive, his perception of her emerges from diegetic reflections that revise his description based on his evolving negative attitude towards her. At first, James writes that Olive is a "young lady" with a "cultivated voice" in whose "aspect" even Basil Ransom detects "something very modern and highly developed" (9, 16). When the narrator subsequently forgets her youth and foregrounds her age, however, James indicates that the narrator aligns these descriptions with Basil's prejudice, as he "perceived" that, despite her "modern traits," her "quality" and "destiny" is actually that of "a signal old maid" (16). More tellingly, during their first meeting Basil is possessed "for a moment by a whimsical vision of becoming a partner in so flourishing a firm" after reflecting on the benefits of her "cushioned feminine nest" (15). He briefly imagines Olive to be an eligible marital partner: one with money, political connections, and a house on Charles St. in Beacon Hill, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Boston overlooking the nouveau riche of the newly developed Back Bay.[29] In

[28] Ibid., 251.

[29] Basil's need for financial security, which motivates his initial interest in Olive, stems from the supposed emasculation of the south in the Civil War. His response and developing antipathy to Olive in part relates to the way her gender and financial security contrast with his own. See Leland S. Person, "In the Closet with Frederick Douglass: Reconstructing Masculinity in *The Bostonians*," *The Henry James Review* 16, no. 3 (1995): 292–98.

this easily missed aside, Basil's first reaction to the woman he spends the rest of the novel denigrating is to desire the benefits an alliance which Olive would afford.

The contrast between Basil Ransom's initial "whimsical" vision of entering a marriage-like "partner[ship]" with Olive and his later revision that Olive is "unmarried by every implication of her being," deeply shapes the novel's apparent antipathy to Olive (16). In fact, Basil's imagination of "partner[ing]" with Olive prompts a temporal interruption in the narrator's account. Reaching into the novel's future, the narrator reports that "afterward" when the pair had eaten dinner, Ransom was able to determine that he could never "make love to such a type as that"; in that same paragraph, the narrator indicates that "several months later" Basil reflects on the "advantages" that Olive had granted in this initial meeting. These staged prolepses are "however, in the future"; and the narrator interjects to indicate that "what Basil Ransom actually perceived" was Olive's celibacy: "That was her quality, her destiny; nothing could be more distinctly written" (15, 16). James's narration here is contradictory; he writes of a Basil Ransom who in the immediate moment sees Olive as a marital prospect; yet we see her "actually" as an old maid after the narrator's interjection of his perspective from the novel's future.

By contradicting his initial desire for a partnership with Basil's later rejection of Olive as sexually undesirable and a threat to his own desire for Verena, James illustrates the role of Basil's bias in denigrating and sexually ostracizing Olive. Olive's closest contact with a heterosexual institution in the novel and its quick rejection echoes through the text's remainder and amplifies her oddity in ways that stem from her sexual affinities—at least, as Basil Ransom views them. Such revisions make the negativity of Olive's sexual typology suspect. But it also reshapes the time spent with Olive itself as formally distinct from the novel's later chapters, the chapters from which Basil retrospectively views the novel's initial stage of "psychological

intimacy." The fact that Basil reflects on his initial meeting as a "little chapter of his visit to his queer, clever, capricious cousin" marks Olive's difference as visible through a literary duration, coupling Olive's queer time to the novel's structural elements (157).[30] For Basil, encountering Olive is retrospectively like a strange duration of a novel, something seeming out of place within the larger narrative, something also diminutive and to be dismissed. Olive, like that moment in time, inhabits a queer space—one that Basil views diminutively, despite the fact that those first few days of their meeting take up nearly a third of the novel's diegesis. Complicating Basil's retrospective gaze further is that the reflection and dismissal have a complex origin: Basil is, in the future of the novel, by no means a neutral observer, and his negative retrospection seems to have less to do with Olive than Basil's later motivations to steal Verena from her. Ultimately, Basil's insistence on Olive's difference originates not necessarily so much in Olive herself, but in his distaste for the possibility of her marrying Verena. What looks like Basil's homophobic disgust in fact originates from his inability to have what Olive is on the verge of possessing.

The subtle shifts in James' management of the narrator's perspective, and prejudicial, view of Olive performs a function vital for unpacking how James situated his novel's sexual politics. Since James begins the novel by emphasizing public points of view of Olive's novelty through Basil and Mrs. Luna, he foregrounds their public standards of evaluation. The appeal to a recognizable public standard of social values echoes James' claim in "The Art of Fiction" that "the only reason for the existence of the novel is that it does attempt to represent life," and that it

[30] Eric Haralson argues that the "indeterminacy . . . that distinguishes *queer* is precisely what recommended the term to writers or narratives preoccupied with the murky dynamics of modern sexualities." Eric L. Haralson, *Henry James and Queer Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

should work “to convey[]. . . the surface, the substance of the human spectacle.” (5, 13).[31] Given James’ own attention to both the surface and depth of novelistic representation, his strategy of representing Olive from Basil’s retrospective vantage that has both an apparent and subtextual level takes on additional significance in the *kind* of life he represents. The calibrated choice to represent Olive’s oddness shapes the novel’s perception negatively, but that representation has caveats: it is evident not only retrospectively, but from the vantage point of two characters who appear to value outmoded social standards. Keeping James’ evaluative criteria for novelistic value in mind reinforces the need for attention on Basil’s revisionist attitude towards Olive as well as the focalization strategy that depicts Olive as an outsider scrutinized by a normative public sphere. The cunning in this retrospective approach is its appeal to a readership with whom James was famously hostile.

Retrospective interjection of Basil’s regressive opinion allows for James to talk about sexuality and the politics of sexuality without going through a dangerous process of naming sexuality per se. But it also forces readers to contend with the implications and public resistance to novelty more generally. What makes James’ strategy of initially focalizing the novel’s perspective from Basil’s point of view especially relevant is how contemporary reviewers responded. Reviewers themselves saw James’s interest in suffrage and political agitation as covering for a complex question about sexual subjectivity. Some professed to be startled by how James seemed to dislike the characters of his study. More interesting are those reviews that explore the novel’s “familiar theme of love” which James had “revolutionized” through the “novelty” that this theme arises through the circumstances of his novel’s romantic intrigue.[32] In

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[31] Henry James, *The Future of the Novel*. Ed. Leon Edel. (New York: Vintage, 1956), 5, 13.

[32] Hayes, *Contemporary Reviews*, 155.

fact, contemporary reviews of the novel during its serialization and publication frequently made connections between women's suffrage and the oddity of the novel's sexual possibilities, even if rather obliquely. In addition, for many reviewers, the novel had aesthetic problems that were in part related to its choice of subject matter in the radical women James places at the center of his novel. In the public eye, the recognition of romance and sexual novelty alike emphasizes the central contention of James's project: to explode the requisites of heteronormative social and temporal organization. Much as Basil dismisses Olive, his reviewers dismissed *The Bostonians.*

At the narrative level, for James' critics, the narrator's slipperiness made the novel difficult to evaluate. Though many reviews approached the novel inconsistently—some claiming it exemplary of James's craft and others finding it largely unreadable—a consistent question was about the kind of woman Olive represented. Mayo Williamson Hazeltine, a reviewer in the New York *Sun*, suggests that there is something in fact unrepresentable and perhaps salacious in Olive's attachment to Verena. Writing that Olive is somehow inscrutable; declaring that Olive "is not so much unsexed as sexless," Hazeltine finds it problematic that Olive does "not sufficiently explain herself [in her relations with Verena]—we should say unbosom herself, if such a word did not appear inapposite."[33] The suggestion here—that Olive has something to explain or to "unbosom," in the sense of disclosing something secret, implies a hidden quality that is itself difficult for the reviewer to name, a secretiveness that is also about the body and its visibility.[34] For Hazeltine, the relationship between Olive and Verena challenged expected aesthetics of public and private sexuality that bordered on the profane. Amplifying Hazeltine's

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[33] Ibid., 164.

[34] "unˈbosom, v.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/209914?redirectedFrom=unbosom (accessed February 08, 2018).

sense of the illicit, an anonymous review in the Springfield *Republican* suggested that Olive was beset by psychological instability. The “effect of contemplating her”, as the reviewer claims, “is identical with that produced by an examination of insanity.”[35] This reviewer goes farther still, claiming that Olive’s role in the novel becomes “much too tragical, it overweighs the tale, which becomes a treatise on alienism.”[36] What is especially interesting here is the way that the tragic collapse of Olive’s relationship with Verena moves Olive herself outside of the civic fold—Olive herself becomes an example of ‘alienism,’ which is a term used in the late nineteenth century to describe mental disorders as well as, in the U.S. usage of the word, the status of being a foreigner or of having an outsider status.[37] Olive’s difference, in these remarks, registers the multifaceted ways in which Olive’s struggle for inclusion combated a state unresponsive to both women and non-heterosexual relations, as well as the rhetorical apparatus that was developed to institutionalize responses to non-normativity more generally.

When Horace Scudder reviewed *The Bostonians* in *The Atlantic Monthly* in June 1886, however, he took these critiques a step farther and suggested that Olive’s behavior and desires ruptured the realm of the natural in ways that threatened the social fabric and that compromised the novel’s aesthetic form. Though Scudder found that “composition in character is extremely truthful and skillfully shown,” he nonetheless worried that James “push [ed] his characters too near the brink of nature that we step back and decline to follow.”[38] Particularly troubling is, perhaps unsurprisingly, Olive’s relation with Verena. Scudder writes that, contrary to the book’s

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[35] Hayes, *The Contemporary Reviews*., 166.
[36] Ibid., 166.

[37] "alienism, n.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/5007?redirectedFrom=alienism& (accessed February 08, 2018).

[38] Hayes, *Contemporary Reviews*, 168, 170.

initial appeal to women's' equality, James instead writes a "study of the particular woman question" emblematized by Olive, which to Scudder seemed a separate question. Though the novel follows the "familiar predicament of one heroine and two heroes, one of whom must get and one lose the prize, the two heroes here are a man and a woman, but the struggle is of the same general character. Who is to have Verena?"[39] The uncanniness here in part concerns the familiar romantic format and the conversion of a marital romance, so often used to depict U.S. political stability, for other ends.[40] For Scudder, these relationship structures were not merely problematic, they were an affront to a "natural" sexual order that James was dangerously close to transgressing.

The affronts against the natural and the problems of the novel's structure become especially problematic for Scudder as the novel progresses, intensifying his concern as the novel cements the binary between Olive's non-normativity and Basil's investment in institutions like marriage. Complaining about Olive and Verena's unnaturalness from the outset, Scudder writes that something about the novel is in fact "dangerous," not only for the reader but for James himself. Scudder writes:

> Olive and Verena in Olive's house carry these young women to dangerous lengths, and we hesitate about accepting the relation between them as either natural or reasonable. So far does this go that in the author's exhaustive reflections upon the subject directly afterwards, we feel as if another step only were needed to introduce a caricature by Mr. James upon himself.[41]

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[39] Ibid., 169.

[40] See Cott, *Public Vows*, 18-19.

[41] Hayes, *The Contemporary Reviews*., 170.

Ultimately, Scudder believes that the "almost indecent exposure to Miss Chancellor's mind" causes James himself to be "contaminated by the people he has been associating with in this novel."[42] For Scudder, James's novel's threat of "contamination," of "unnatural exposure" and of "dangerous" implication are all conveyed by the way "Olive and Verena are built up like a coral reef [in the first book]; in the second, the contesting parties manoeuvre [sic] for position; in the third, the conflict takes place."[43] At this juncture, the contaminations of which Scudder complains are deeply imbricated within the novel's most basic structure and antagonism, which is queer in part due to the simultaneous visibility and unspeakability of Olive's love for Verena and her political and romantic contestation with Basil over the duration of that relationship.

These reviews and their diagnosis of the novel in terms of contamination and danger illustrate what was at stake in James' approach to the representation of sexual novelty and gender equity. Not only is Olive framed as "unnatural," contagious and alien both psychologically and to the state because of her political project for recognition and inclusion, the mere representation of her difference itself seems a social transgression. In terms of James' approach, the obviousness of Olive's difference has a second function: both to cancel out any empathetic reading of Olive and to disallow any future empathy with her in ways that illustrate the headwinds against social change that she, and queer figures more generally, faced. The strategy is carefully managed: Basil's revelations of Olive's difference occur either in the reach to a future not yet depicted, or its clarifying reflections on the diegetic past. For contemporary critics of the novel, even that revision was not enough to suppress the radicalism suggested by Olive.

[42] Ibid., 170.

[43] Ibid., 169.

The conjunction of Basil's negativity, Olive's strange inhabitation of time, and the reviewer's harsh reaction to Olive and Verena's relationship together provides an opening for reading the novel's conceptual impact on its contemporary public sphere. In his theses on narrative time, Paul Ricoeur suggests that that nonconformist presentations of time in fiction open innovative spaces for social scrutiny. As Ricoeur writes, "only fiction, precisely, can explore and bring to language this divorce between worldviews and their irreconcilable perspectives on time, a divorce that undermines public time."[44] That irreconcilability appears in both Basil and the reviewers. And yet, while fiction's narrative strategies, for Ricoeur, make separations in public time evident through narrative strategies like retrospection, James believed that fiction could inaugurate forms of being and intercede in social formations. The containment strategy by which James provides our view of Olive through hostile viewers, in a seemingly counterintuitive way, allows for us to see her to begin with: it permits her representation at all because of the way the novel hedges its position *vis a vis* Olive. In this sense, James not only reflects, but shapes queer representation in public. In "The Art of Fiction," he writes that fiction itself can manufacture that which we consider real and historical. "The only reason for the existence of a novel," James posits, "is that it does attempt to represent life": "as the picture is reality, so the novel is history."[45] Reading this claim, Sam See supposed that queer figures like James have a different relation to narrative intervention. For See, the generative capacities uniquely available to novels can "create its own history" and mode of being for queer subjects.[46] In See's view, the manufacture of sexuality as mode of restriction also establishes a mode of

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[44] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 107.

[45] James, *Future of the Novel*, 5.

[46] Sam See, "Bersani in Love," *The Henry James Review* 32.3 (Fall 2011): 195–203, 200.

powerful agency beyond the reverse discourse Foucault describes.[47] The act of narrating difference and, more importantly, of narrating the violence of normativity refashions the queer figure not as a reactive entity, but as an agential and creative one. Perhaps because of the nascent quality of queer consciousness itself, these narrative interventions illuminate the unstable position of queer subjects, showing a nascent subjectivity whose emergence pushes beyond what Ricoeur proposes. More than detailing political contradictions, this retrospection creates a queer consciousness that might otherwise have been inexpressible.

The distinction illuminates the way that James not only suspends the period of Olive and Verena's political and intimate courtship, but also how that suspension holds at bay a political public sphere that scrutinizes Olive's status as an "old maid" and refuses to grant the same skepticism to Basil Ransom's retrograde policies. Ricoeur's claims that the novel is "the privileged instrument for investigating the human psyche" takes on a different light in which the domain of the novel allows a reader to experience fissures and incommensurate experiences.[48] James' narrative innovation is to embed readers in the slow section of the novel, which provides the contact that makes Olive and Verena's intimacy possible, and then to undercut that contact with revelations from the novel's conclusion. At first, James lingers on Olive and Verena, even when channeling their depiction through Basil Ransom's skeptical focalization. When changing his view of Basil and Olive over the course of the narrative through proleptic interjections, James's narrator invites revelations from outside of the immediate diegesis, foregrounding the ways in which the novel's sense of Olive's oddity originates from the moment of the novel's end. These interventions contrast first impressions with subsequent perceptions, especially with regards to Olive's sexuality. This interventionist strategy is where James' narrator reaches his

[47] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 101.
[48] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 89.

most cruel attitude towards Olive: in a telling aside, James' narrator interrupts the moment of Verena and Olive's first introduction to contrast Olive's "nervous ecstasy of anticipation" with the sense that Verena should "shrink" from Olive's advances (64). At this critical juncture, the narrator intervenes: "Verena wondered afterward why she had not been more afraid of her, why, indeed, she had not turned and saved herself by darting out of the room" (64-65). The intervention shapes the intimate space James affords Olive, who is caring despite her oddity, who wishes to find "an absolute sanctity for Verena" that could "bind them together for life" (87). While James depicts Olive's desire for a bond with Verena as at least strange, its menacing qualities emerge from the narrator's dislike of Olive's oddness rather than from the social threat of their queer relationship.

This kind of prolepsis telegraphs that their mutual intimacy and attraction will collapse, regardless of the feelings that qualify Olive and Verena's first interactions. In this manner, James highlights Gérard Genette's thesis that narrative "draws near its end, *which is also its origin*": James makes the revanchist politics of these prolepses obvious in that Basil's view vengefully erases Olive's value and the legitimacy of her feelings.[49] These proleptic reaches to the novel's future constitute the method by which James gives Olive a sexuality at all, and the antagonism to normalcy of that sexuality emerges from *Basil* rather than from an innate quality in Olive. Since that sexual assignment occurs by virtue of Basil at first finding her a marital prospect, and subsequently rejecting that prospect, Olive's sexuality becomes a negative difference almost totally contextualized by Basil's regressive politics, which are themselves damningly retrograde. Staged through the novel's narrative anticipations, James leaves readers to

[49] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 226-27.

ask whether Olive's non-normativity is her strategic choice, or an imposition made by a hostile observer. From unpacking how the negative view of Olive emerges from Basil's retrograde political vision, it is easier to view Olive's reach towards an inclusive future through her sexuality, and to contextualize Basil's specious interest in preserving a backwards view of the U.S. social and political makeup.

Putting a premium on the capacity of novels to depict subjectivity suggests a special ability of this novel to grant access to the inexpressible and the unnamable, an ability that James cruelly dramatizes by showing how Ransom's revisions erase Olive's kindness.[50] Genette posits that narrative structure illuminates the governing "psychology" of the narrator and especially psychic change within a narrative point of view. He suggests that "a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells" results in the troubling suspicion that "extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic, and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to the same narrative."[51] The implication here carries more charge than Genette might allow in that readers who join in Basil's suspicion of Olive participate in a kind of violence against her. James instead entices a critique of Basil by involving readers in the sexual policing that marks Olive as indelibly outré. Examining narrative time and structure refocuses our reading on the fact that Basil's prejudice frames our attitudes towards Olive. Though Olive can be viewed as the standard bearer for a new sexual future, that future hinges on our interpretation and/or our complicity in Basil's retrogression. The future is not so much in her hands, but in the complicity of readers in Basil's violent erasures. When

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[50] Catherine Gallagher notes that the novel allowed readers to imagine subjectivities unavailable to them, particularly for women imagining life beyond marriage. See Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel, ed. Franco Moretti, vol. 1: History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 336–63.

[51] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 236.

readers like Horace Scudder linger on the unnaturalness of Olive's relationship with Verena, it appears that James' opaque strategy was all too effective.

2. Marital Time and Plot Progression

The psychologically intimacy with which James begins the novel, builds the early stages of Olive and Verena's relationship, and shades their attachment with queer otherness ultimately is rather short-lived. Nonetheless, the section echoes across the remainder of the novel, accumulating the sense that Olive and Verena's romance was automatically visible as non-normative. The insistent categorization of Olive as odd, queer, or abnormal also illustrates the pressure on figures like Olive to adhere and to adopt the emerging consensus of the value of heterosexual normalcy. After all, Verena and Olive find a diametric opposite in Basil Ransom's insistence that womanhood, and Verena, must be protected from both political exposure and from Olive's radical program—and the novel appears to privilege Basil's opinion on the matter. Yet, because the romance and desire for Verena structure the novel overall from both Olive and Basil's point of view, the novel rhetorically traces a kind of combat over whose vision of future sexuality will prevail. What James is excruciatingly careful to leave unenunciated—that is, the character and qualities of their relationship—is also the motivation by which the plot of the novel takes over, accelerating towards their split and a potential resolution in normative marriage.

The Bostonians shifts away from Olive and Verena by means of a dramatic change in its narrative structure. After retrospectively sowing the intimate space in which Verena and Olive meet with the seeds of their relationship's failure, James' narrator shifts the narrative time of the novel. Moving from the metric of minutes and days interrupted by retrospective interventions from the future narration, he switches to a sequence of months and years. The second temporal

frame, which dominates the novel, traces Olive and Verena's program for the "emancipation" of women, during which time Basil Ransom attempts, and ultimately succeeds, in wooing and eloping with Verena, removing her from Olive's contact and preventing the public exposition of Olive's theories for women's equality (21, 120, 176). The "suspense of narrative" that gave birth to Olive and Verena's relationship falls to the background with the looming threat of a marriage plot, splitting the novel's narrative time into two discrete forms, one whose slowness gave birth to queer attachments, and, the other which succumbs to the logic of marriage.[52] The cleavage in the novel's time provides a significant key to its politics, specifically to the way in which James pits Olive and Verena's queer intimacy against the time promised to male subjects with the rights of citizenship. This cleavage in time coincides with the specter of a promised union and a proposed marriage. Since this transition occurs at the moment when Verena offers to commit to Olive and the concomitant moment when Verena is first proposed to, James locates his narrative rupture in the contrast between the kinds of relationship that can exist and the futurities they suggest. James' evocation of the heteronormative progressive time suggested by the marriage plot, however, ironically twists that idea of social advancement by positioning Olive as the representation of progress. Conversely, Basil's ideas are "three hundred years behind the age," which weds retrogressive ideologies to the heteronormative time otherwise implied by his desire to woo Verena (148). While gesturing towards a "normalized" plot, James upends the ways that heterosexual relationships indexed progress within the strictures of marriage and sexual conformity.[53]

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[52] William James describes the novel's plot structure as such in a letter. See James, *Letters of William James,* 250.

[53] Marcia Jacobson dissects the relation between this particular marriage-plotting and its antecedents in 1870s and 1880s women's fiction, as well as the relation of marriage to activism. See Marcia Jacobson,

The movement into heteronormative emplotment begins when Verena promises herself to Olive. James writes:

> The next time Verena saw Olive, she said to her that she was ready to make the promise she had asked the other night; but to her great surprise the young woman answered her by a question intended to check such rashness. Miss Chancellor raised a warning finger; she had an air of dissuasion almost as solemn as her former pressure . . . it was tinged in this case, indeed, by such a bitterness as might be permitted to a young lady who cultivated the brightness of good faith. (106)

James leaves unmarked the specific time that elapsed between Verena's promise and Olive's measured acceptance. Olive even pauses the time of their deepening intimacy by lingering on the promise to develop a mutual understanding of its gravity. And at this moment, Olive reflects once more on her temporal difference.

> My dear child, you are so young—so strangely young. I am a thousand years old; I have lived through generations, through centuries. . . You must pass through a certain phase, and it would be wrong in me to pretend to suppress it. . . I don't want your signature; I only want your confidence—only what springs from that. I hope with all my soul that you won't marry; but if you don't it must not be because you have promised me. (106)

The contrast in Olive's sense of durative time with the immediacy of Verena's promise elevates their program from a momentary satisfaction to a longevity that extends Olive's plans for their relationship far into the future. The pause lingers on the quality of the promise they make, which

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"Popular Fiction and Henry James's Unpopular 'Bostonians,'" *Modern Philology* 73, no. 3 (February 1976): 264–75.

depends not on Verena's "signature" on a contract, but on Olive having Verena's "confidence" and "what springs from that" (106). Their joint future depends on Olive's desire for Verena to dedicate herself perpetually to Olive instead of promising allegiance by contract, which suspends their intimacy further because it places them both outside the lifetime promise of contractual, marital time. Put in another way, Olive asks Verena to join her in a frame outside of the expectations of marriage for which there is no concrete model.

The self-perpetuating relationship Olive wishes to inaugurate, however, comes to a halt when met with the threat of normativity. When Matthias Pardon approaches Olive to propose a marriage to Verena as a way of financially supporting the program for women's equity, the novel changes from the loosely marked time that surrounds Olive to a regimentation indexed to Verena's potential marriage. Where previously James marks time nonspecifically, such as "the next time" Verena and Olive met, now his markers become calendrical: James describes how Matthias Pardon visits Olive "about the middle of December" to propose funding her campaign and to marry Verena, positioning the meeting with the marker of a month and season, compared to the looseness of Olive's "next time." Pardon's proposal of co-managing Verena shocks Olive: the narrator opines that, after his proposal, in Olive's eyes "the battle had begun, and something of the ecstasy of the martyr," connecting the novel's subsequent temporal specificity with the presumption that Verena's marriage is a foregone conclusion (113). The narrator begins to note time in detail: he documents the elapse as "the week after" or "the "three months" that pass after the "introduction of Verena into the fold" (113, 126). After Verena offers a commitment to Olive and Olive declares that she would "rather trust [Verena] without a pledge," James suspends their relationship outside of any contract such that their commitment must continually be renewed (108). He also starts a clock, in which Verena and Olive's dedication to female equity and to

each other faces off with the intrusion of male intimacy that threatens the "sanctity of [their] union" (121). In this period of the novel, James chronologically denotes the elapse of the novel's time, marking the passage of the hour, month, or week between events. Following this proposal by Pardon, Olive decides that she must act to preserve her intimacy with Verena, initiating the rupture that separates the novel's slow initial portrait from the sequential section spanning over a year. The shift places the conventions of a marriage plot against Olive's desire that Verena will "attach to her permanently" and eschew marriage altogether (110). The novelty of Olive and Verena's "union" contrasts with marital normalcy: the introduction of a marriage itself exactly when Olive and Verena define their attachment as something provisional and always to be renewed in time makes the novel's chronology a contest between Olive's antinormative mode of inhabiting time, and the normative world's demands of contract, definition, and duration.

The threat of Matthias' Pardon's marriage proposal prompts Olive to think differently about time and forces her into a consideration of marital and public time concomitantly. Fearing a "permanent" partnership between Olive and Verena, Pardon comes to negotiate a split in their right to Verena. When he asks Olive "how long did she expect to hold her back," Pardon implies that it would benefit Verena to enter into a normative time frame by marrying—anything else would be a delay. Though Olive wishes to "make him feel how base a thing she held his proposal that they should constitute themselves into a company to draw a profit from Verena," however, James' narrator intercedes to say that "unfortunately" Olive merely asks "how many thousands of dollars he expected to make" (111). The reported speech, however, casts Olive in a more discerning light, contradicting the narrator's editorializing over Olive's purported commercialization of Verena. When Pardon suggests that her monetary benefit "depends on the time" because "she'd run for ten years, at least," Olive retorts. When she asks "I don't mean for

Miss Tarrant, I mean for you," Olive gets to the heart of the question: that Pardon wishes to marry Verena for notoriety. Where Pardon declares that he wants to fund Verena "to make history!" Olive suggests a desire for the longevity of social change, not for the instant of its occurrence. She observes that "the change in the dreadful position of women was not a question for to-day simply, or for tomorrow, but for many years to come; and there would be a great deal to think of, to map out" (112). The conflict in time frames couples Olive's ideas about social change to the same time frame that she wishes to share with Verena: one on a longer time horizon, and one that requires constant renewal. Instead, the narrator attempts to diminish Olive's discernment by suggesting that he "suppose[d] it was because he was a man" that Olive rejected Pardon (112). More pointedly, the narrator's refusal to understand Olive's time frame threatens to diminish Olive's agency at the moment she comes into the most challenging conflict with normative time.

The interchange and conflict with Pardon illustrates another dimension of James' narrative strategy concerning the relation to of her project to a reactionary public discourse. According to Richard Salmon, "the fictional contest between Basil, Varena Tarrant and Olive Chancellor is itself a conflict over the appropriate form and function of public discourse, and, more particularly, over the control of a 'voice.'"[54] Pardon especially seems concerned with what that voice will be—shaped by Olive or legitimated by his potential attachment to Verena. Especially at this moment in the text, when Pardon threatens to sanitize Olive and Verena's radicalism within the confines of marriage in order to shroud Verena's discourse of social equity and change within the familiar institution of marriage, concerns over public perception threaten

[54] Richard Salmon, *Henry James and the Culture of Publicity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15.

to restrict Olive's control over her political movement and her control of Verena alike. As such, James "dramatizes the emergence of rival discursive claims," having to do with public rights, social citizenship, and sexual expression simultaneously.[55] James continually revises the narrative's attitude and view of Olive, at once introducing readers to Olive's novelty while also navigating readers through the ostensible threats she produces for the idea of a stable polity in her attempts to reshape a public sphere hostile to her novelty. The stealth of James's strategy is in the way his most critical perspectives on sexually radical characters actually recuperates the revolutionary novelty that the text otherwise seems to condemn. Though it is possible to read the exchange with Pardon as critical of Olive's scheming, Olive's sneering rejection of Pardon's proposal also exposes it as an attempt at exploitation, an attempt to wrench Verena from Olive's purer purposes. Olive's critique, however, is shrouded by Pardon's point of view. Ultimately, the discussion of Olive's palatability, and Pardon's suggestion that she must be sanitized to be effective, telegraphs the way in which Olive will eventually be forced to succumb to a political public sphere that has no place for the intimacy she and Verena temporarily share.

The narrator's sarcastic depiction of the print public sphere here, as envisioned by Pardon (and later implied by Basil's failure to publish his regressive articles on social change), suggests a more critical vision of normative ideology than seems immediately apparent. As David Kramer argues, depictions of Pardon and Basil "function as displacements for James's anxiety about the popular press, while they offer occasions to demonstrate its inferiority."[56] For Kramer, Pardon's interest in print media's more lurid and gossipy aspects marks his ineffectiveness as well as his

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[55] Ibid., 16.

[56] David Kramer, "Masculine Rivalry in *The Bostonians*: Henry James and the Rhetoric of 'Newspaper Making,'" *The Henry James Review* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 139–47, 140.

feminization and limited virility.[57] Though Pardon professes a desire to woo Verena, Olive herself notes that he does not constitute a threat: she finds "something in his appearance that seemed to say that his sympathy would not be dangerous," in what Kramer reads as a suggestion of his lack of masculine interest and possibly latent homosexuality. Instead, Pardon redirects his erotic energies into the public sphere, with which he cultivates "a state of intimacy with the newspapers" that surpasses his interest in Verena herself (96). Though the idea of feminization as a code for queer feelings is itself somewhat overwrought, if nothing else James turns the critique of the very public sphere that ostracizes Olive back on itself: he shows it to be ineffectual, erotically stunted, and superficial. In the end Pardon lacks what Olive and Verena have: a requited relationship, even if that relationship is not socially legitimated. Though Olive's rejection of Pardon has been read as a kind of attempt to control and possess Verena, she also undermines the stability of the social critique that scrutinizes her difference and yet sanctions the behavior of people like Pardon. For Olive to reject Pardon is also for Olive to reject his conception of public, media time in favor of a temporality of her own making.

Though Olive attempts to reject public time and to sequester Verena from the public sphere, her attempt reinforces narratives of public time because Olive ultimately wishes to be visible within the public eye and in terms of public institutions. Public time, in this sense, both threatens and acts as a necessary point of reference. James registers this threat through a shift in form: the conflict between Pardon and Olive over marriage provokes a shift into a more delineated narration of time's passage, one that emphasizes a linear progress invoked by the prospect of marriage. Right after this exchange, the narrative observes that "a week after this" Olive and Verena discuss and reject Pardon's marriage proposal. Their intimacy secured, James

[57] Ibid., 145.

describes how “she came near to being happy” and that “her nerves were calmed, her problems—for the time—subsided” as Olive and Verena express “the closeness and the sanctity of our union” (119, 121). Their respite stems from an anticipation of a “triumph as ultimate and remote” that brings them a feeling “so religious as never to be wanting in ecstasy” (123). These moments themselves are marked as being fixed in historical time. Here it is “the winter of 187—, a season which ushered in the most momentous period of Miss Chancellor’s life” that lasts till “about Christmas,” returning to calendrical markers (123). In the background, though “Mr. Pardon had not yet taken his revenge in the newspapers” (133), the two engage in a period of secluded reflection: they study the “history of feminine anguish” and how “their odious partner had trampled on them from the beginning of time, and their tenderness, their abnegation had been his opportunity” (141). Even while James creates a space in which Olive and Verena generate a feminist history, he marks this space with the sense of its impending closure.

Olive’s and Verena’s season of feminist inquiry coincides with the most dramatic rupture in the novel’s narrative continuity when Olive removes Verena to Europe for a period of study that is not documented within the diegesis. This period follows Olive’s “very eloquent” argumentation for women’s history and rights. When the narrator describes how Olive “reminded Verena how the exquisite weakness of women . . . had only exposed them to sufferings more acute,” he shades Olive with capability, rather than a neurasthenic weakness (141). Following Olive and Verena’s enthusiastic colloquy, the pair travel to Europe, rupturing the novel’s narrative progression by concealing this period of time, which also restricts readers’ access to Olive’s enthusiastic arguments for women’s history. Olive’s motivation to remove Verena from the “officious fellow citizens”—i.e., marriageable men—who threaten her independence prompts this rupture in time. James isolates Olive and Verena in two ways: one,

from the U.S. and American civic life, and the other from the novel's description. The period of Olive and Verena's uncontested intimacy is outside U.S. belonging and the novel's time alike, suggesting that the kind of intimacy Olive and Verena share cannot be aligned with either normative ideas of social time or existing orders of citizenship, since Olive and Verena can only prepare to argue for their rights by departing the U.S. and its history. The strategic gap reinforces the *difference* of their shared time, giving diegetic space to the patriarchal view that suppress their intimacy. After the voyage that Olive hoped would bind Verena to her, the novel returns to Basil Ransom and his insistent pursuit of Verena. To exist in public time, James suggests, is to either conform to or be threatened by a regressive social order. Moreover, the reassertion of patriarchal public time shows the violence of public sphere to the emergent intimacy Olive and Verena share.

3. Queering the Citizen's Progress

Olive's interest in preserving Verena from "officious fellow citizens" offers a sly critique of the ways in which marriage and the temporality implied by these civic structures organized citizenship in the postbellum literary imaginary. Here, Olive seeks to save Verena from men and from their imagination of citizenship, in order to form something better. As such, Olive interrupts the predominant progressive narratives of U.S. growth that relied on marriage to establish national futurity and ironically positions queer people like herself and Verena as progressive visionaries. After Olive "invented" her sexual category, her loss of Verena enables her to stand on her own as a political figure and a figure of sexual difference, perhaps offering a new model for queers in the public sphere (262).[58] But this transition of Olive's into a figure in

[58] Often Olive is discussed as inventing. Here, Basil contextualizes: "I don't object to the old old maids; they were delightful; they had always plenty to do, and didn't wander about the world crying out for a

her own right carries collateral damage in that it cements the different poles she and Basil inhabit. At the beginning of the novel, their division was not assured. In a conversation early in the novel with Basil, she asks whether he "care[s] for human progress" and suggests that if he joins her in visiting lectures on women's rights he will see an "earnest effort towards" that future (18). As the novel soon reveals, Olive's politics will be to seek the "diffusion among the women of America of a more adequate conception of their public and private rights" in an effort to enfold women in the political sphere (30). Here, the disjunction between external perceptions of Olive timeframe (i.e., from Ransom, Ms. Luna, or even the narrator) and Olive's internal perception of her future orientation stand starkly at odds.

In recent readings that recover the potential positive dimensions of Olive's queerness, her novelty and desire for a future of civic change play an important role. For Peter Coviello, Olive's liberation constitutes her "unprecedentedness," in that she is "caught between a hunger for articulacy" and "languages that misrecognize that love in ways that are themselves painful and even disfiguring."[59] That dynamic is evident in the loneliness of her novelty. As Coviello writes, "James finds in Olive a way to anatomize the fate of a person made for love, but not heterosexuality, in the dwindling moment before new names for that queer love would achieve a definitive prominence" (179). What is especially interesting is the way Coviello locates James through a discourse of loss—of a burgeoning sexual expression that neither James nor Olive yet fully understands because of its inarticulacy. For Coviello, James's novel marks the end of an era of sexual indeterminacy, and the arrival of modern sexuality in ways that heighten Olive's awareness of the loneliness caused by the very break from the past that she inaugurates. As

vocation. It is the new old maid that you have invented from whom I pray to be delivered" (262). Basil's negative view of 'inventing' places his regressive politics against the novelty that Olive, however problematically, advocates.

[59] Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties*, 180.

opposed to Heather Love's reach to the pre-sexological genealogies of the past in which queers can find precedents for their love, Olive is reaching towards something different. In his view, Olive is situated as a character who must contend with change, though the categories themselves are novel to her. As such, in Coviello's view, James at once reaches back towards a past in which indeterminacy remained viable, yet lights the way towards a future, however problematic, in which such queer desire as Olive expresses might be recognized, authorized, and permissible.

Where Coviello contends that *The Bostonians* diagnoses the end of an era with less defined sexual schemata and the coming articulation of queer possibility, Benjamin Kahan supposes that James takes a more active role in categorizing sexual possibility. In a concurring way, Kahan describes Olive's novelty through Olive's celibate role in imagining a queer "future [that] is unwritten."[60] In a positive recuperation of Olive's role, Kahan suggests that the conflict between novel and negative terminology allows Olive to emerge on her own terms as the "messenger of her own message" where she had previously been limited as an old maid and a neurasthenic.[61] Particularly, Kahan claims that Olive's celibacy is a strategy of carving out a space that resists the binary expression of homo- or heterosexual. Kahan defines the celibate as not merely a "repression" or "closeted" individual whose "internalized homophobia" allows contemporary critics to read non-normative sexualities; rather, celibacy is "a sexuality in its own right" that "resist[s] compulsory sexuality" and is situated as "a period in between sexual activity" (2). In other words, celibacy for Kahan is not only a gap in our binary order, but a cautious vehicle for negotiating sexuality itself. The celibacy Olive emblematizes also proposes a

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[60] Kahan, *Celibacies*, 6.

[61] Ibid., 52.

new category of civic subjects, outside of the norms of marriage, but viable as an independent subject with equal rights in part because of a neutralized sexuality.

The celibate in Kahan's articulation, is most important because of the "potential" to transcend the restrictive world of counterpublic resistance by instead privileging "indeterminacy" as an exploratory mode outside of the political fields that demand specific modes of behavior (6). When Kahan writes that "Olive is unmarriagable in my sense because marriage is an anathema to her politics," he observes the way that she carves out a subject position outside of the modes of formal intimacy and state recognition that constrict not only women but queer figures in her day (44). In effect, Olive claims celibacy in order to secure a future of unrecognized rights for the disenfranchised. In Kahan's analysis, the celibate arises as a sexual identity category because of the extremely delimited sexual categorizations that the nascent homo/heterosexual binary demanded at the turn of the century. But it is through this space in between binary performances of sexuality that celibacy is able to claim a political agency by decoupling from sex as an act and preserving a safe political ground for social and political participation. As James' reviewers note, however, the celibate as a stable sexual category was not in itself enough to secure Olive's safety from the public eye: her contagion, regardless of her potential sexual activity, threatens to escape the novel in ways that his reviewers found dangerous. As a gambit, celibacy as an identity category is not as secure as Kahan posits. Moreover, vying for celibacy erases the passion Olive feels for Verena, threatening to neutralize the desire behind her novelty.

In reaching towards an unwritten, inarticulate future, both Coviello and Kahan helpfully observe that Olive's sexual and political novelty rejects heteronormative temporality. The view that they advance hinges on a terminological specificity: on Olive being unprecedented, on the terms that mark Olive's rejection of heteronormativity. But the picture is more complicated when

we assess the harsh perspective of the narration, which reinforces normativity and by extension Olive's transgressiveness. Kahan and Coviello's readings thus have to contend with a different indeterminacy in the novel's conclusion, in which Olive's loss of Verena and Verena's elopement with Basil stages what looks like Olive's defeat. At the level of plot, the movement towards heterosexual marriage closes the novel, ending Verena and Olive's intimate and political ties; that movement towards marital union appears to align the novel with the reunion romances that were a prevalent literary form after the Civil War for narrating national cohesiveness.[62] Novelty, as Coviello and Kahan suppose, is not enough to recover Olive's radical survival.

Most importantly, and this is where Coviello's and Kahan's readings can be refined, to read Olive as a symbolic figure for queer public futurity means resisting the narratology of the novel's conclusion. Against the grain of a prejudicial reader, James manages to discover Olive's agency through her resistance to the *plot* whose culmination depends on the loss of her political and romantic partner. In this light, it is remarkable that Olive succeeds in building a political movement even after losing Verena, in spite of Basil Ransom's retrograde revision of her and the narrator's complicity in circulating similar biases throughout the novel. By contextualizing the novel's negative pressures on Olive and Verena as stemming from the novel's alignment with a public sphere that is dismissive of and violent to Olive, we can re-situate the novelty and remarkable quality of Olive's politics and her romantic inclinations. Olive may not be, as Coviello claims, "made for love" in her era's terms, and she may be celibate by not having an institutional place, but that does not mean she refuses desire for the social and civic formations she cannot have. Her gesture to reshape those institutions appears a gesture towards a utopian

[62] Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 6-7.

future. James' strategy in having readers inhabit Basil's prejudice is to situate readers in the very violence that makes Olive's proposal seem impossible.

This is where James's split narrative temporalities assist in decoding the novel's politics. Writing of the novel's "politics of temporality," Susan Mizruchi argues that James' use of delay, deferral, and suspense comprises a formal strategy to critique liberal narratives of progress. Mizruchi writes: "the ability to make another wait is pivotal to the novel's American culture, bent on progress and the pursuit of gain. Moreover, the varying degrees of concealment or ambivalence evident in characters' seizure of temporal control disclose a general distrust of authority in the novel's democratic society."[63] In Mizruchi's view, the novel not only characterizes Olive as attached to "millennial hopes" and "present change, while Ransom is "caught in time" (202, 204). Mizruchi suggests that the novel's strategy of anticipating rifts and suspending the reader is key to the novel's political gestures. She argues that the narrator "forc[es] the characters and the readers to wait, delaying the revelation of some point anticipated, or by forcing the characters to review their pasts, to confront their places in the unfolding of time as a process of change that cannot be transcended."[64] Mizruchi is right that the novel critiques easy praise of liberal democratic narratives of progress. And yet Mizruchi does not address how the process of change effects Olive unequally by holding her queer expression at bay and erasing her agency and novelty. Where both Genette and Ricoeur suggest that novels act on the world outside by complicating narratives of the past and of progress, Olive shows a queer gesture for social change that reaches outside the novel, even while the novel itself revises the narrative to limit her agency. James' novel is certainly too snide to blithely inaugurate any particular new

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[63] Susan Mizruchi, "The Politics of Temporality in *The Bostonians*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40, no. 2 (1985): 187-215, 189.

[64] Ibid., 190.

polity. However, the novel offers a different politics through Olive's unprecedented citizenship that does not fit Mizruchi's liberal model, even if the change Olive proffers is not fully realized.

The narrative's acceleration towards Olive's disappointing break from Verena, in a way, also documents the failures of the liberal model to achieve transformational social changes in which Olive could be recognized. The damage of that failure registers in the movement from the novel's initial psychological sketches to emplotment: here James places the sexuality that he has drawn between Olive and Verena in increasing friction with the forms of intimacy that register in the public sphere. Despite the professed "sanctity" of Olive and Verena's union, the narrator's insistence that their relationship is "strange" and has a "peculiar" nature makes their partnership appear unsustainable in the face of unrelenting critique (121, 296). Indeed, the narrator indicates that "no stranger situation can be imagined than that of these extraordinary women," ironically positioning Olive as a progressive because her relationship's novelty, having elements "probably as complete as any (between women) that had ever existed" even if it was "a very peculiar thing" (301, 296). James navigates readers through moments of their shared passion (in one case called a "passion as high as had ever found shelter in a pair of human hearts") punctuated by moments of suggested rupture (Olive's "dreadful, ominous, fatal" feeling that "Verena was not sincere"), with the intermittent implications that Verena will fail to uphold Olive's political aims (319, 293). Against the inevitable conclusion of marriage that would resolve these peculiarities, James' strategic delays indicate his resistance of the plot that would result in Verena's marriage. With this threat looming, James lingers on the remarkable persistence of Olive and Verena's relationship against all odds.

This form of suspense—holding his readers in proximity to an untenable queerness—nonetheless structures the novel's plot-heavy latter chapters. For example, in a climactic

anticipation of the break that will ultimately rend Verena from Olive, Olive confronts Verena for wavering from Olive's affections and from her politics. At this juncture, Basil interrupts Olive and Verena at their hotel in New York, where Olive and Verena were seeking backers for the public debut of their lectures. Verena, who leaves with Basil for a few hours, throws Olive into intense doubt. Reconvening later in the day, Olive and Verena have one of their most intense moments of conflict, which forecasts their ultimate rift. James writes: "For an instant the two young women stood confronted, and a person who had seen them at that moment might have taken them for enemies rather than friends. But such an opposition could last but a few seconds" (289). By suggesting that some latent antagonism underlies their relationship, the narrator projects their untethering, even though this rift is mere seconds long. In a subsequent impassioned moment, Olive and Verena confront the increasing possibility of separation, when Olive implores Verena: "Don't desert me—don't desert me, or you'll kill me in torture" to which Verena responds, "you must help me, you must help me!" (292). The emphatic futurity that they demand (that Verena "will kill" Olive and that Olive "must help" Verena) from one another implies a future dissolution that they both seem to know is near at hand.

Suspense, in this sense, originates from Olive's fear that Verena will abandon her and succumb to the marriage form: from the beginning, Olive is "haunted . . . with the fear that Verena would marry;" she worries that Verena might have "kept something from her" even while it is very clear to Basil and Mrs. Luna that Verena would "give Olive the greatest cut she has ever had" (92, 160). These offhand intimations counteract Olive and Verena's passion and suggest that their intimacy is unsustainable. Moving deeper into the novel's second stage, the intimations of their unsustainable intimacy accumulate into a plot that systematically dismantles that intimacy. The novel's action in its later stages is always positioned at the cusp of either

endorsing the novelty of Olive and Verena's "invented" relationship or endorsing the retrograde normalcy of Verena's fascination with Ransom, which threatens to sequester Verena "five hundred years" in the past (262, 211). James depicts an unstable moment between these opposing temporal pulls, with Verena at the center of contestation between the regressive past and the aspirational future that Basil and Olive separately channel. The suspense of the novel's later plot concerns which tie will prevail.

These anticipations situate Olive and Verena within a contingent future, one that James laces with threats of failure that are inserted in earlier moments of diegesis. James' revisionist strategy itself models the dangers that a historical reflection might face in interpreting the past by showing how Olive's difference is made to appear abnormal in her choice to reject norms and use that rejection as a motivation for political reform. As Sedgwick might say, Olive shows readers that sexuality can be expressed in multiple ways, whereas the narrator attempts to flatten sex into an either conformist or degenerate contrast. The narrator's prejudice shows the imperative of "denaturalizing the present" rather than, as the narrator does, retrospectively applying sexual categorizations.[65] For Olive, new sexual expression is progressive, while for the narrator (and perhaps the reader), they threaten a degenerate negativity that would not be a foregone conclusion *before* the narrator's revisionist interventions. While James employs this method to sow doubt about Olive throughout the text, his form also shows how violent the intrusions are in Olive's life, how they foreclose the possibility of Olive's affections for Verena ever being recognizable, namable, or endorsable.

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[65] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 48.

For Annamarie Jagose, that suspenseful movement between the identified and the as yet inarticulate contextualizes how the novel interacts with public discourses more generally. As Jagose claims, James is deeply interested in the way that public schematics for sexual relations put a brake on the novelty Olive otherwise would symbolize. She locates this interest especially through the novel's contestations over the most recognizable form of endorsing sexual relations: marriage. Jagose writes that the novel's "fascination with marriage" is "discernable less as a straightforward consequence of its relationship to privacy and intimacy than because of its ambiguous characterization as both private and public."[66] In Jagose's view, the contrast between the "discourses of love, consent, and futurity" and "the discourses of law, public policy, and state sanction" constitutes the novel's sexual relations as inherently political in scope through a tension between the future and the limited adaptability of the state.[67] Nonetheless, for Jagose, the oppositional forms of marriage that the novel places in contention offers same-sex marriage in a contestable public sphere in a way that helps to change and shape sexual cultures more broadly. Marriage, then, is central to understanding James's "elaboration of sexual cultures" because of the tension between the "legal joining of man and wife and the Boston marriage's resistant troping of same-sex intimacy."[68] In these ways, homosexual possibility, civil rights, and marriage all intersect to reshape the texture of sexuality and the civic bodies that represent and restrict sex. Moreover, the failure of Verena and Olive to secure their relations reveals the revanchist draw of state institutions more generally—but the suspense of that failure allows readers to linger on Olive and Verena's non-normative possibility. Those consistent reminders of

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[66] Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 68.

[67] Ibid., 68.

[68] Ibid., 69.

their novelty push against what it seems will always be the more powerful draw—of Verena back into marriage and Olive's abandonment, a threat that makes the forecast loss appear all the more tragic.

Even though consistent anticipations presage their ultimate separation, the largely ephemeral quality of the interruptions to Olive and Verena's intimacy at the same time allows readers to imagine the earnestness of their mutual ardor, especially in absence of Basil's interventions. The novel's prolepses interject, similarly to Basil, forcing the reader to evaluate the durability of their feelings of affection, but not to question the feelings of shame and denial. These interjections regulate Olive and leave the readers suspended between recognizing the depth of desire between her and Verena, and the simultaneous counterpoint that such a desire must be suppressed. They mark the rise of a disciplinary apparatus that limns the boundaries of sexuality as we understand it contemporarily—a largely binary construct, an either/or. We are left with a sense that Olive's desire is not necessarily problematic in itself, but rather a projection of a prejudicial narrator. It is this intervention that *necessitates* an antagonistic view of Olive on the sexual level, despite her privileged position as a member of the Boston upper class—a distinction that she would not necessarily have claimed for herself. In a genealogy of sexuality in which the queer rejection of normativity tends to be the only choice by which to be visible, Olive offers a different model, one of queer hope and progressive agency that is only made *antinormative* as opposed to merely non-normative through a retrospective lens.

It is within this disjunction between Olive's sense of self (her future political objectives, her sense of her own sexual relations) and public perception that indicate an interpretative opening for the novel—one that has implications for the way we read Olive not only as a citizen with fully recognized rights but also as a queer subject who is just beginning to articulate a

discourse around her difference. Olive, towards the novel's conclusion, rejects the points of view of those around her, allowing her to invent that space on her own, even if through the loss of Verena. Once again, the approach to novelistic verity that James proposes in "The Art of Fiction" provides some guidelines for how we might read the indeterminate territory in which he places Olive at this juncture. He writes:

> The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implications of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the conditions of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to know any particular corner of it—If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions are experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe.[69]

In this passage, James indicates that fiction helps to quantify implications in a way, later to be echoed by Willa Cather's privileging of the "thing not named," that values not the terminological specificity by which categories of experience and of identification emerge in writing, but in the "impressions" that surround it.[70] But the strategy, as much as it allowed James to say the unsayable, also invited dangers, most profoundly illuminated by the increasing antipathy of Basil to Olive as a person and to her relationship with Verena. By embedding us, for the most part, in Basil's antipathy, James plays a complicated political game that emphasizes a generally negative attitude towards Olive and her novelty alike. It is a regressive practice, one whose implications impact the entire novel as they harden in the novel's development. But amidst that regressiveness, James gives us an Olive with whose impression we might develop a level of sympathy because of the cruelty of the patterns by which the novel constitutes her. James asks

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[69] James, *Future of the Novel,* 13.

[70] Willa Cather, *Not Under Forty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936), 45.

that we trace the unseen in Olive in order to understand the potentiality she represents, and the pressures that restrict her expression.

When Olive finally steps on to the stage in Boston's Music Hall, the novel pushes back against this prejudice and tenuously imagines a social order that could potentially grant women full rights in the public sphere. The fact that this political outcome is achievable through Olive's sexuality instrumentalizes that sexuality and carves out a subject position uniquely available through her.[71] Such a conclusion is possible because, even at this final stage, James insists that the negative views of Olive's public capability are Basil's. When Verena elopes, James focalizes a view of a tragic Olive from Ransom's perspective, noting that "as soon as Ransom looked at [Olive] he became aware that the weakness she had shown had passed away" to be replaced by "desolation" and a "vivid presentiment of blighted hope and wounded pride" (348). Subsequently, "Ransom had a vision, even at that crowded moment . . . [that] she would have rushed on [the stage] without a tremor, like the heroine that she was" (348). James points out Basil's instant negative view and writes of Basil: "If he had observed her, it might have seemed to him that she hoped to find the fierce expiation she sought for in exposure to the thousands she had disappointed and deceived in offering herself to be trampled to death and torn to pieces" (348). In Basil's mind, the violent destruction of Olive that his retrospective view had anticipated throughout the novel is on the cusp of realization.

At this late juncture, however, James' narrator has other objectives. Instead of Olive's violent destruction, we find that Basil is the perpetrator of violence. In eloping with Verena, the

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[71] These spaces of identity (and their contradictions) are important for Chantal Mouffe's discussion of citizenship. She writes that citizenship "is an articulating principle that affects the different subject positions of the social agent . . . while allowing for a plurality of specific allegiances and for the respect of individual liberty." This concept of identity as a mode of allegiance and articulating principle illuminates how Olive's sexuality and her activism for rights coincide. See Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (New York: Verso, 2006), 70.

narrator figures Basil's actions as a "kidnapping" that he had long before envisioned (306): When Verena "suddenly shrieked" with a "piercing cry [that] might have reached the front of the Music Hall," Basil had "already, by muscular force, wrenched her away" from the public scene he decries. At this juncture, James shows Basil to be not only dangerous but petty in his desire to own Verena. Finally, at the novel's closure, James denies Basil a view of the catastrophe for Olive that he so desired. He misses this moment in his rush to abduct Verena, in the novel's final, powerful, and ambivalent conclusion, which questions whether Olive or Basil is the victor.

> As they mingled in the ensuing crowd he perceived the quick, compete, tremendous silence which, in the hall, had greeted Olive Chancellor's rush to the front. Every sound instantly dropped, the hush was respectful, the great public waited, and whatever she should say to them (and he thought she might indeed be rather embarrassed), it was not apparent that they were likely to hurl benches at her. Ransom, palpitating with his victory, felt now a little sorry for her, and was relieved to know that, even when exasperated, a Boston audience is not ungenerous. (349).

As each of Basil's visions of violence unwinds, leaving himself the sole perpetrator, Olive rushes to the stage of which she had been debilitatingly terrified. The crowd greets her respectfully, but even now, Basil's prejudicial view recodes that scene with inklings of his desired outcome: Olive's failure and ridicule. Because these anticipations are singularly from Basil's point of view, they must be understood through the lens of his prejudice. Since Olive finally achieves political exposure with a "not ungenerous" audience, a "respectful" attention of "the great public," we can read against the grain of Ransom's words to imagine success for the queer woman who had been the target of such derision. Where Olive had originally wished to "be a

martyr and die for something," the novel ends with a perhaps more significant success: the potential, even if unrealized, for a political career (12). This moment of capability revises the novel's denigration, and positions Olive as an agent of change opposing the violence of Basil's regression. Verena, by contrast, departs "in tears"—with the narrator suggesting that "it is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed" (350). By depicting a moment of pain for Verena rather than Olive, James leaves his readers with the impression that the evaluative apparatus of the novel had unfairly targeted Olive.

The novel, in effect, was prejudiced from the start, suggesting that readers themselves were complicit in its prejudicial operations. Yet, while the narrator writes Olive outside of normative theories of progress, James offers Olive as a character who attempts to rewrite what the progressive and activist future might become. In this case, Olive stands apart: she resists what Heather Love calls the "strain of failure" detectable from Walter Pater onward that was a "reaction to the experience of marginalization."[72] Olive, though marginalized, and though her project may ultimately fail in its radical transformation of the public sphere—a failure that James purposefully withholds—she nonetheless persistently engages with the very political public sphere from which she is excluded, shifting its shape along the way. In this light, we may read Olive as asymptotically approaching, if not ever realizing, a future that she had always desired and that the public must face: these features make Olive a sort of queer heroine and leave Ransom's presumed "victory" an empty one. By becoming a public figure despite a plot that

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[72] In Walter Pater, Love reads "withdrawal . . . not as a refusal of politics but as a politics of refusal" in which she sees a "queer response to the experience of social exclusion." Contrary to Love's reading of backwardness in Pater, Olive does not withdraw, providing a counterpoint to Love's example of backwardness. Olive, conversely reaches to a possibilistic future because of her engagement. Love, *Feeling Backward*, 58.

unraveled Olive's own intimacy with Verena in favor of the latter's elopement with Basil, Olive emerges as an unexpected victor; she subverts the demands of the novel's heterosexual temporality to find a long-desired agency. The two conflicting narrative temporalities of the novel rush us towards this anticipated moment of change, but leave us on the edge of the stage, now quiet with Olive's final emergence, waiting to hear what the product of her conflict will bring, what voice will emerge.

By creating Olive as a change agent in spite of the novel's plot trajectory, James cautions against readings that indiscriminately assign, apply, or police distinctions separating non-normative sexual identification from the future of progressive citizenship. Rather, *The Bostonians* proposes a provisional queer becoming—a point at which queer difference becomes visible to the point of being political, yet a point at which that visibility has not congealed into a concrete identity. It is, in temporal terms, to be not quite *before* the category and not quite *after* either—but inhabiting a moment of change.[73] The balance of this time between radical indeterminacy and definitive identity indicates that the literary itself can at least show inflection points in public conceptions—or, as Sam See writes, it can "create that which it invokes."[74] Perhaps Olive Chancellor is such a creation—one that in herself offers a radically queer future by and through the melancholy of presentist politics. In contrast to novels that endorsed, circulated, and formed public perceptions of heterosexual normativity, Olive proposes a civic world whose progress is pushed by queer ideals, rather than erasing them. In a novel as

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[73] Eve Sedgwick makes this temporal gesture in a discussion of Melville's *Billy Budd*, which she writes is a "fantasy about a life *after the homosexual*" that is contrasted to the "fantasy of life *before the homosexual*" (93n3). See also Christopher Looby "On Billy's Time: Temporality in Melville's Billy Budd," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 45.1 (Spring 2015): 23-37, 35.

[74] Sam See, "Richard Barnfield and the Limits of Homoerotic Literary History" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13.1 (2007): 63–91, 64.

indeterminate as *The Bostonians*, James invites the possibility that, outside a rigorously policed social world, queer intimacy might be more tenable than the novel, at first blush, permits. In so doing, James offers a model of queer world-building that operates at the immediate horizon of the political, even if that horizon also seems impossibly distant.

Chapter 2

A Deceitfully Permanent Present: Realism and the Limits of Heterosexual Futurity in A Hazard of New Fortunes

> *Where is it, this present? It has melted in our grasp, fled ere we could touch it, gone in the instant of our becoming . . . Reflection leads us to the conclusion that it must exist, but that it does exist can never be a fact of our immediate experience.*[1]
> —William James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*

> *Democracy in literature is the reverse of all this. It wishes to know and to tell the truth, confident that consolation and delight are there; it does not care to paint the marvelous and impossible for the vulgar many, or to sentimentalize and falsify the actual for the vulgar few. Men are more like than unlike one another: let us make them know one another better, that they may be all humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity.* [2]
> —William Dean Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*

For William Dean Howells, navigating unity was important part of literature's social and political function. His 1891 treatise on literary criticism in the democratic age suggests as much: evoking the fundamental egalitarian promise of the United States, he writes that the realist author "feels the equality of things and the unity of men" and writes accordingly.[3] But the unity the realist author feels was not always self-evident in the context of social and demographic changes to U.S. society during which literary realists wrote. As the final statement of his essay indicates, realism's responsibility to advance "democracy in literature" concerns a fundamentally problem about democratic heterogeneity: effective fiction will, as Howells suggests, "make [men] know

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[1] William James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2001), 147.

[2] William Dean Howells, *Criticism and Fiction and Other Essays*, ed. Clara Marburg Kirk and Kirk, Rudolf (New York: New York University Press, 1959), 87.

[3] Ibid., 15.

one another better" to build a sense of fraternity that "leaves no doubt of an unlimited future" for a changing nation and its people.[4] The prospects of such a future envisioned in "Criticism and Fiction" seem both optimistic and near at hand, as was especially evident in the literary movement to which he had devoted his career. Indeed, Howells' conviction that "the whole field of human experience was never so nearly covered by imaginative literature in any age as in this" celebrates the present moment in literary innovation for advancing inclusivity for the nation's ever diversifying array of citizens and subjects.[5] More significantly, he imagines literary production as a singular agent of the social renegotiations that would be critical to improving the equity of U.S. institutions and social life. In the conviction that literature itself can advance an "unlimited future" by both depicting and imagining civic change for the populace more generally, Howells profess a progressive liberalism that imagines realism at an aesthetic *avant garde;* fiction, in his view, was playing and would play a substantial role in inaugurating a positive future by imagining a better kind of present.

Published just a year before his landmark treatise, Howells' 1890 novel, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, appears to emblematize the call to represent a democratic future in an increasingly heterogeneous polity. One of his most ambitious novels, Howells himself declared that it was "the most vital of his fictions" in its scope and topicality. [6] Critics in general seemed to agree, and the novel was well received for its portrayal of the diverse array of lives and livelihoods in New York as well as for its interest in social justice. An example of realism's democratic impulse, the novel covered an array of contentious issues in contemporary life, from labor

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[4] Ibid., 87.

[5] Ibid., 56

[6] John W. Crowley, *The Dean of American Letters: The Late Career of William Dean Howells* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 19.

activism, to Gilded Age capitalism, the aftermath of the Civil War, the rise of the self-made man, and the changes in social life wrought by mass industrialization and immigration. At first blush, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* appears to exemplify the political imperative of the late-century novel to advance social equity in light of such dramatic changes. And yet, the optimism Howells expresses for democratic futurity in "Criticism and Fiction" is less readily evident in the novel that preceded. Acknowledging the challenges facing democratic stability, Howells fictionalized very recent historical events that suggests a breakdown in U.S. politics rather than its unity, including reflections on the legacy of the Civil War and on 1880s labor unrest in the rapidly industrializing cities.

To address the recent legacy of civil unrest, Howells picks a perhaps familiar target: a middle-class family and the drama of their interactions with social and political trends. Following the movement of the novels' primary characters, Basil and Isabel March, from Boston to New York, the novel depicts their reactions to New York's social and cultural heterogeneity, but also to the very real conditions of political life across the class spectrum. Along the way, the novel traces the March family's anxiety about urban life and their own marriage, domesticity, and economic futures as well as the lives of other upper- and middle-class aspirant families. The novel's fictional depiction of this domestic displacement had another goal: to show the larger impact of literary fiction outside of the domain of middle-class domesticity. Writing that the scene and topics in New York allowed him access to "issues nobler and larger than those of the love affairs common to fiction," Howells suggests that the bourgeois domesticity and marriages frequently depicted in fiction should more directly index broader social contentions.[7]

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[7] Qtd. in Phillip Lopate's introduction to *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), xi.

The world outside the domestic domain, unlike the symbolic marriages imagined in the reunion romances of the period, was disharmonious. Howells approached contention in kind by fictionalizing labor riots and contingent discussions of labor rights and policy and contrasting them with the bourgeois perspective and marital contention of the March family. This perspective organizes the novel's approach to the political climate after the 1886 Haymarket riots and the subsequent execution of alleged organizers, an event whose implications for the common citizen he found deeply troubling.[8] At the surface level, the novel exemplifies what Howells's theory of realist intervention professes: that by reflecting on the moment of the present, fiction can start to shape the future by helping readers understand class conflict, cultural heterogeneity, and diverse aspect of urban life. But it also appeals to a bourgeois sensibility in order to tie together spheres of national life and social status that seemed both segregated and underrepresented in the novel as a genre. Yet, while gesturing towards a future in which these separate spheres could be integrated, Howells' novel remains surprisingly bounded by the politics, conditions, and prevalent discourses of present-day bourgeois normalcy in which his novel interceded.

Against the democratic optimism of "Criticism and Fiction," then, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* paints a troubled picture of social change, at the regressive center of which is the middle-class family. In fact, the predominance of bourgeois normalcy and its attendant heterosexual, economic, and political affiliations leave the pathways toward social change doubtful. This concern overrides many of the novel's other social and political concerns, subordinating Howells' democratic impulse to the persistent worry over the status of

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[8] For a reading of Howells' radical response to contemporaneous labor unrest, see Sender Garlin, *Three American Radicals* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991); and Carl Dawson and Susan Goldman's *William Dean Howells: A Writer's Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 276-89.

heteronormative social and economic life. Symbolizing this cluster of concerns novelty itself seems the source of the March family's trouble as they interact with and adapt to New York's urban heterogeneity. Upon arriving in New York, March is beset by indecision about the family's relocation after being hired editor of a recently established bi-weekly periodical, *Every Other Week*. On the one hand, the prospect of editing a "journal [of] such quality and authority in matters of art as had never been enjoyed by any in America before" provides a welcome reprieve for March's static career in Boston.[9] Despite the appeal of such radical novelty, Howells juxtaposes March's opportunity with what his wife Isabel March refers to as the "uprooting" of their family from the ease of suburban life. What emerges in the balance is a persistent worry amongst the Marches concerning the shape of their domestic, economic and marital futures as the security implied by the normalcy of their life is subsumed into the strange, modern newness of New York. Rather than the promise of a secured future of progress, economic contribution, and domestic security, the Marches express disquiet about the lives of their children, employment, and their housing stability in New York's housing market.

The shifting anxieties and insecurities experienced by the Marches in *Hazard* complicates a prevailing thesis about the late-nineteenth century U.S. novel: that the neutral heterosexual family represents the stability of national life. For example, Nina Silber suggests that romances of reunion, a predominant mode of late-nineteenth-century U.S. fiction, represented national reunification through marriage, by focalizing political conflict through ruptures of kinship and fraying familial bonds instead.[10] Brook Thomas concurs that the idea of union was fundamental

[9] William Dean Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 121. All further citations appear parenthetically in main text.

[10] Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1993, 5-6.

to the realist novel more specifically. He claims that realism attaches romantic contracts to a "utopian vision" predicated on heterosexual conformity.[11] The representation of political membership, in these articulations, largely depended on circulating heterosexual families, middle class domesticity, and kinship continuity that imagined a homogeneous nation and contrasted it with the heterogeneous world outside.[12]

In *Hazard*, Howells provides a quite different narrative arc than the utopian vision or reunified polity that Silber and Thomas suggest. Instead, he recounts the decentering of the March family from the bourgeois domestic stability on which they had pinned their financial hopes as well as the hopes of their children's upbringing. In effect, he depicts how the domestic family interacts with a future whose teleology seems less and less secure. As Amy Kaplan has diagnosed, the domestic instability in *Hazard* "undercuts the common ground of [Howells'] theory of realism" in part by "test[ing] the viability of domesticity as a touchstone of the real."[13] In one part, the displacement of domesticity is demographic: the movement from Boston to the

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[11] Brook Thomas, *American Literary Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 47-48.

[12] Howells plays with ideas of domesticity and realism that Kaplan has troubled. See Kaplan's "Manifest Domesticity" for a discussion of how domesticity emerged as a topic in the late nineteenth century novel for enforcing a division between the spaces of home and exportation of U.S. democracy abroad, in ways that emphasize that the domestic is also a question of the state and state membership. When Howells discusses labor riots as if "troubles on the frontier," you can find an echo of her discussion. Amy Kaplan "Manifest Domesticity." *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (September 1998): 581–606, 373.

[13] Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 46-47. Other critics of realist representation, especially Priscilla Wald in *Constituting Americans* shows the limits of storytelling, without an emphasis on literary realism. See Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). Steven J. Belluscio's *To Be Suddenly White: Literary Realism and Racial Passing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006) sustains an argument that social constructivist readings of U.S. literary realism show the constraints placed on the agency of nonwhite subjects. What's useful here is that in the novel self-determination comes under threat. Making moral choices based on self-aware observations of "real life" might not result in progressive or positive social outcomes. In this sense, the realism of the novel reaches the limits of political representation for which Howells otherwise advocated.

heterogeneous life of New York, where a “lingering quality of Americanism” intermingles with “foreign faces and foreign tongues” sets up a conflict in which the diversification of the U.S. metropolis decenters a family like the Marches in symbolizing the future of American life (270). But the destabilization of heterosexual futures is in fact an endemic problem within the family unit as well: it impacts not only the March family, but the other middle-class families in their orbit, who experience a shared anxiety over the displacement of bourgeois family’s durability. In these additional plot thread, the novel reaches its most poignant revocation of heterosexual futurity through the loss of Conrad Dryfoos, the son of a gas magnate and capitalist, in a labor riot in New York. Coupled with Conrad’s death, the conflicts faced by the March family indicate a concern that a progressive political ideology cannot be ensured by either domestic security or reproductive futurity. Despite Howells’ investment in literary interventions in U.S. sociality and politics, his most explicitly political novels reveal a marked pessimism channeled through the displacement of the family’s centrality from its privileged place in U.S. narratives of progressive growth. When the Marches move to New York, they not only shift the structure of the family’s tranquility and cohesion, but change the narrative of what the future holds for the nation itself away from the symbolic, white, heterosexual family to something diverse and variegated.

What the novels offer instead is an enduring crisis of the present. When Howells’ narrator suggests that “we are creatures of the moment; we live from one little space to another,” he focuses on an experience of time and history that does not necessarily build linearly towards progressive change and breaks the clarity of the progressive future (385). As such, the presentism that pervade *Hazard* stands as something of a contrast to the way in which Howells viewed his fictional projects more generally. It means holding in suspense the aspiration that his work can

participate in the redress of fundamental inequities in U.S. governance and society.[14] Rather than symbolically representing an egalitarian future near at hand, his novel appears stuck in contemporary conflicts whose resolution never appears, putting pressure on the ability of the novel itself to reach towards an "unlimited future."[15] In an assessment of the evacuation of his belief in literature's advancement of social change, Howells began to believe that, even as fiction represented more contentious topics, it was failing to change public opinion and social perception. Upon reflection, Howells appears to find the novel as a conduit for futurity acutely overloaded by the very social conditions that he advocates might be changed through literary production.

To address Howells' approach to the failure of progressive futurity, this chapter charts the ways in which *A Hazard of New Fortunes* contrasts the changing shape of the civic body and public politics with the conflicts of the white, bourgeois family symbolized by the Marches. By presenting politics as a crisis of the present, disarticulated from a clear, progressive future, and by channeling that crisis through interruptions in the family form, Howells presents a perhaps unexpected critique of the attachment between reproductive, familial futurity and U.S. narratives of growth and development. First, I examine the ways in which Howells frames the

[14] Such viewpoints that literary products were tied to the citizen makeup of the nation often emerge alongside claims that art inherently works towards progressive ends. As Clarence Darrow claims in his 1893 essay "Realism in Literature and Art," the "true picture that [the artist] paints or draws makes the world a better place in which to live" such that these artists may propagate "the hope of greater justice and more equal social life" (Darrow, in *The Documents of American Realism,* ed. Donald Pizer, 141). Or, as Hamlin Garland claims in his essay "Productive Conditions of American Literature," American writers must reject the idealist mode, "which is generally the past" and instead strive "to create in the image of life" which "is the only road to never-ending art. That means progress, and forever progress." (Garland in *The Documents of American Realism,* ed. Donald Pizer, 156). A general consensus emerges throughout these assessments of American literary realism, that the foreword progress of the texts effects a positive change on the social environment that they interact with, that their literary consumers participate in, and that the novelist him or herself must be attuned to. See Donald Pizer, ed., *Documents of American Realism and Naturalism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998).

[15] Howells, "Criticism and Fiction," 51.

Marches' move from domestic security in Boston to New York as an interruption in time. As I suggest, the crisis in the family's trajectory resists the narrative of progressive growth and economic security that they represent and against which realist novels dramatized shifts in contemporary social conditions. Second, I trace the novel's approach to the changing shape of domestic economy as it interacts with the print public sphere. As March negotiates uncertainty in his employment Howells raises larger questions about the durability of domestic security in the face of economic change and the drive towards aesthetic innovation. Third, through Basil March's attempts at interjecting novel forms in traditional print media, I discuss how Howells portrays the civic structure of the city itself and the effects of urban heterogeneity changes on politics and domestic arrangements. In a sort of sociological exploration of New York, Howells presents March as an outsider even within his own nation, and his relationship with his wife alike as an antiquated form compared to modern romance. Through Basil's sketches of heterogeneous life in New York, Howells explores other forms of novelty, including relationships outside of the domestic sphere the Marches operate within.

Finally, I explore how Howells uses the crisis in the Marches family in order to demonstrate a broader breakdown in the possibility of domestic romance to secure stable futures. Through the riot with which the novel's drama climaxes, Howells representation of familial loss intensifies the attachment between the present and a rupture in normative domestic time. Moreover, the breakdown of the family coincides with a dramatic rupture in the novel's form as it documents the loss of Conrad Dryfoos in a labor riot and the subsequent death of Basil March's friend, the German Civil War Veteran, Berthold Lindau. Reading the disruptions that occur after the labor riot the novel depicts, Howells aborts the heterosexual romance of the novel's ancillary characters, especially Conrad Dryfoos and his love interest, Margaret Vance.

The expression of the momentary as a predominant feeling state is thus dependent on a literal rupture in kinship and family. More broadly, however, these narratives focus on broken ties of kinship (especially though the loss of children), stalled economic development, and the shifting civic fabric of the U.S. polity. Such pragmatic concerns relate the family and its instability with the changing shape of the national polity. In the end, the novel challenges the premise that the stable, reproductive, economically secure family can secure the nation's development. Instead, *Hazard* present a crisis in heterosexual unions as the stable form for representing and advancing the progressive state, leaving the narration to confront the uncertainties of the present.

The domestic, reproductive, and economic crises in *Hazard* extend the conclusion of the previous chapter. Rather than diagnosing the difficulties or impossibility of homosexual feelings, however, this chapter explores the limits of heterosexuality as a social standard. In contrast to the queer interpretation of progressive inclusion advanced by *The Bostonians,* Howells explores the limited imaginary that requisite heterosexuality implies for national life. After Olive, what are the implications for the attachment between the heterosexual family and political progress? How does the displacement of the heterosexual family from the center of the progressive narrative reshape literature's approach to both representation of sexual normalcy and its presumed status as a neutral signifier of the nation? *A Hazard of New Fortunes* takes up these questions and explores how crises in the political and literary conceptualization of the present emerge as an important point for U.S. realism. Rather than consolidating hegemonic forms of U.S. politics and sociality, Howells conceptualizes the present as a moment of political crisis. As a result, he challenges heterosexual futurity as a stable signifier for the narratives of national progress even as the visibility of heterosexuality and its compulsory requirement for civic membership was becoming more pronounced.

1. The Ends of Marriage and the Feeling of the Present

At the conclusion of *Hazard*, Howells offers a surprisingly direct critique of marriage's role in literary depictions of social progress that encourages a re-evaluation of the role of marriage in the novel's plot more generally. Instead of suggesting that novelistic depictions of marriage represent the forefront of literary innovation, he suggests that "non-marriage" would be more artistically forward thinking. After the novel has documented the long journey through the Marches' marital life after their move to New York, the reflection is surprising. While "non-marriage" presents a literary innovation, theirs seems stuck in a past from which new fiction should be liberated. Basil laments to his wife:

> Why shouldn't we rejoice as much at a non-marriage as marriage? . . . By-and-by some fellow will wake up and see that a first-class story can be written from the anti-marriage point of view; and he'll begin with an engaged couple, and devote his novel to disengaging them and to rendering them separately happy ever after in the denouement. It will make his everlasting fortune. (434)

When Mrs. March declares the prospect a "delightful idea," her assent emphatically contrasts the novel's generally initial emphasis on the value of "domesticated" marriage as a desirable source of civic and social security (434, 7). That Mrs. March ultimately assents to the merit of "non-marriage" as a topic stands as a dramatic revision of her earlier "refusal to be amused" to March's profession that "unmarried people seem each as complete and whole as an unmarried pair" (33). By its conclusion, *Hazard* has challenged Basil and Isabel March's political ideology and bourgeois identification in many ways; but perhaps few so thoroughly complicate the literary attachment between marital stability and positive futurity than this claim that non-marriage

represents the prospects of everlasting prosperity for the writer. In a way, this revised understanding of belonging, domesticity, and the centrality of heterosexual marriage as a site of plot stabilization appears to be one of the novel's major dramas. But it also represents the evolution and liberal education for the Marches themselves, as their bourgeois security seems increasingly less relevant to the tumult of New York and modernity. The narrative arc leaves the Marches between competing representations of futurity: a tradition in which the marital couple represents progress, and an innovation in which other domestic narratives take precedence.

This critique of marriage makes *Hazard* a unique novel for divesting from in the "utopian vison" of domesticity that critics like Brook Thomas suggest comprises realism's more general mode.[16] As Thomas argues, that vision relates to role of heterosexual marriage contracts in "creatin[ing] proper status relations' between people."[17] Where realism operates by putting points of view in conflict in order to demonstrate the process of democratic resolution that generates good citizens, marriage represents that resolution when relations are codified as durable, defensible, and institutionalized contracts.[18] Indeed, across Howells' corpus, as Allen Stein suggests, marriage plays an important role not only in representing an individual capacity for growth, but for that growth to scale outward to the community more broadly, giving it a signal civic role.[19] And yet, as Amy Kaplan suggests, domestic uncertainty in *Hazard* destabilizes the role of bourgeois heterosexual domesticity in grounding realism's visibility by exploring the instability of post-marital domesticity in a heterogeneous world. In tracing the

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[17] Brook Thomas, *American Literary Realism*, 64.

[18] Ibid., 15.

[19] Allen F. Stein, "Marriage in Howells' Novels," *American Literature* 48, no. 4 (January 1977): 501–24, esp. 503.

shift, Kaplan assessment documents the "variety of strategies" the Marches use to "domesticate the threatening urban terrain" of New York, whose cultural heterogeneity places the Marches at the social and aesthetic margins. Though their own relationship is contractually secure, the relation of that domesticity to their world is not. As such, the focus on the change in scene that New York obscures more fundamental question about heterosexual union as a stable rubric for understanding and adapting to changes in modern life brought by the city and its diverse inhabitants and lifestyles.[20] In contrast to the cultural diversity that surrounds and overwhelms them in New York, the Marches appear bland and normal, and their domesticating mission appears a nostalgic artifact. In that light, positioning "anti-marriage" as a way of revitalizing fiction emphasizes the crisis of family cohesion in the novel; that crisis expands beyond the conditions that the Marches face in New York to question the viability of marriage as modes of representation. Managing diversity, as Kaplan notes, becomes an aesthetic problem for Howells: in moving outside of the focus on the March family, Howells "struggles to contain the centrifugal forces" of his many characters and subplots "within a coherent narrative frame."[21] Just as the Marches observe the irrelevance of a marriage, Howells more broadly suggests that a novel depending on domestic security is no longer at the aesthetic forefront of the literary marketplace.

The decentering of marriage cuts to the heart of realism as a project bent on representing both democracy and bringing together the diverse array of civic life. But where Howells' portrayal of a clear progressive future fails, he replaces that future with feelings of stasis and uncertainty through the Marches' marriage. Subsequently, the insecurity the Marches face in

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[20] Brook Thomas, *American Literary Realism*, 15.

[21] Kaplan, *Social Construction*, 47.

their marriage becomes a vehicle for viewing social conditions, rather than a central fixture in the novel's plot progression. Instead of representing a stable future, Howells portrays the Marches as inhabiting a constant state of worry over their lives in the present. The dismantling of marriage as an organizing concept begins with the domestic upheaval of their move from Boston to New York, which conceals the domestic instability within geographic displacement. When March initially imparts his potential career opportunity to his wife, the narrator opines that "there was always much of the conditional" in Mrs. March's support, which fades from its initial excitement upon discovering that the job necessitates a move to New York and the abandonment of their life in suburban Boston (15). Professing a concern with the stability of the family unit and an unwillingness to sacrifice family cohesion for his career advancement, March claims that he "should rather not experiment in my time of life" (17). Rather, he reports "If I could have been caught younger, I might have been inured to New York, but I don't believe I could stand it now" (17). Despite Basil's equivocation, the Marches do not agree on what this displacement means; on Isabel's worry that the move will "change the whole course of their lives," March relents to her concerns about the effect on their children, though with "bitterness" at what his wife felt (19, 20). When Isabel revises her opinion, the narrator observes that their children "knew they had been quarrelling" and that Basil feels they had "wandered into hostilities" unusual in their relationship" (25).

When the Marches determine they will attempt the endeavor and travel to New York, they are unsettled by its heterogeneity. In their shared surprise, Howells pits the normalcy of their suburban family and the expected timeline of their careers and reproductive life against the frenzied portrait of New York and its more variegated ethnic and family life. The Marches increasingly grow aware that their displacement from Boston is not just geographic but cultural:

Basil and Isabel experience a “loss of their individuality” and a sense of “their own foreignness” once they confront the difference between suburban Boston and Manhattan life (268). These concerns over their shifting domestic lives and economic trajectory intersect with broader questions about their representation within the country: just as they question their own futures and previous life trajectories, the Marches, begin to see themselves as part of a heterogeneous civic body, not all of which they can relate to themselves. What the Marches encounter is what Howells calls “democracy in literature”: that is, an absorption within the heterogeneousness of the late-nineteenth-century civic body. But they find the realization of a democratized aesthetic, which Howells claims indexes the progress of the nation, deeply unsettling in part because it displaces them from a position of civic security and centrality to the novel itself.

The decentering of the Marches from the novel’s aesthetic interest opens a tension in the novel, refocusing attention away from their normalcy both in marriage and in heritage. Though the Marches remain at the center of the novel’s plot, their domestic conflict fades as a plot point. Instead, their role is to illuminate a literal and figurative removal of their kind of subject from the presumed role of representing American civic life and civic futurity, a removal reflected in their marital anxiety. By divorcing the attachment between bourgeois marital life and national futurity, Howells prompts a temporal crisis for the Marches, which appears most emphatically when the Marches travel by train to New York. Having resolved their conflict and determined to explore the city, Mr. and Mrs. March seem concerned about the time of their lives: they at once reflect on their last visit to New York during what they refer to as “their wedding journey” yet also “noted the change” since their last visits (33). In between, the Marches feel suspended in time. Howells writes that once they have set out for New York and their luggage is stowed, Basil and Isabel feel that “the future had massed itself at a safe distance and was seven hours and two hundred

miles away" (32). That nostalgia for the past drags on the Marches' optimism, itself based on a heterosexual and citizen security that is increasingly less central to the social worlds they observe in New York. The ironic quality of March's excitement intensifies the point about optimism's evaporation, which is expressed in the disappearance of marital couple's relation to the futurity for which a couple is expected to collectively aspire. Howells begins to suggest a theory of the present here through the displacement of the Marches and bourgeois ideology more generally from the idea of national progress. He locates the Marches in feeling of suspended time, with the future amassed at a distance, leaving them neither firmly fixed in their earlier understanding of life trajectories, nor clear about the changes that the future will bring.

A subsequent scene of the Marches in transit—literally moving between their past and their future—ties these relations together and emphasizes the stasis of the present. With their financial and domestic future upended, the Marches worry about abandoning their suburban life and the attachments both they and their children have to Boston. Indicating that the economic concern March expresses about his new employment also implicates the stability their children's futurity, Howells suggests a threat to the security of reproductive time. While the Marches lives are in transition, Basil March reroutes the real questions about family stability into an abstraction:

> So you see how the foreground next the train rushes from us and the background keeps abreast of us while the middle distance seems stationary? I didn't think I ever noticed that effect before. There ought to be something literary in it; retreating past and advancing future, and deceitfully permanent present. (34)

March's lyric description of train travel cuts to the heart of the anxiety about the futurity that persists throughout the novel: that the pathways of sight beyond the present are inevitably

obscured; that the present one seems to occupy is part of a blurred timeline whose previous and impending moments remain opaque.

On its face, March's analysis of the "deceitfully permanent present" fits into the general Howellsian theory of progress, in that the "present" is not permanent at all but rather a part of the optimistic advance towards the future. By implying that the blind present is "deceitful" in its permanence, Howells suggests the ephemerality of the Marches' shifting life. The destination of the train and its implied futurity of their arrival indicate an inexorable, and productive, forward march—a kind of an ironic turn on the name of the novel's primary family, whose halting forward progress and general lack of momentum contrast with their apparent ambitions. That this forwardness is in itself the site of "something literary" would seem to cement March's rumination alongside Howells' general ideas of social progress. As such, Basil March acts as a metonym for Howellsian realism in that the march towards progress is prompted by the literary manager who himself seeks to stand at the forefront of artistic inventiveness. That metonym sits at the center of what is otherwise a persistent, if somewhat elusive critique of Howells' own attachment between the novel and progressive futurity, which casts March and his marriage under an intense criticism.

The image of the suspended future metaphorized in this train ride remains murky, however, even while the couple speeds towards New York. For one, the line of sight to the future is occluded by the train itself, blocking a physical view of their destination and inviting more affective ruminations on the futurity that awaits upon their arrival. At the center of this opaque future is a deep-seated anxiety about the cohesion of the family itself, and of the Marches, as parents, to the obligations to and affective investments in their children. But it is also vital that March's "literary" view of the train and its transit as a metaphor for temporal continuity and

advancement is not shared by his wife. Her view is one of transplantation, of a present separated from the contingencies of the future that she wishes to keep at bay because they are unfamiliar (31). As such, the contrast between Basil and his wife hinges on a differential view of the present; for Basil, the present still leads to an exciting, if different future; for Isabel, that future is obscured, anxiety-provoking, and disconnected. The disjuncture in their understanding of time complicates the way *Hazard* either repeats or revises Howells' progressive thesis about literature and social change. In finding the present a site of comfort, Isabel counters March's view of the inexorability of forward movement.

In contrast to Basil's excitement, Isabel asks for something more staid, gendering the future as a potentially hazardously male enterprise, and the present as a feminine caution resultant from the necessity of considering the practicalities of domestic life. Two inhabitations of marital time emerge: the difference places Basil and Isabel March's understanding of their own progress in contention because it radically interrupts the idea of domestic and economic security of March's career in Boston and their home in the suburbs. Regarding Mrs. March, Howells writes:

> In the uprooting and transplanting of their home that followed, Mrs. March often trembled before distant problems and possible contingencies, but she was never troubled by present difficulties. She kept up with tireless energy, and in the moments of dejection and misgiving which harassed her husband she remained dauntless and put her heart into him when he had lost it altogether. (31)

Despite that Mrs. March is a person capable of planning for future contingencies but a few pages earlier in the novel, Howells marks her sense of time as being overly focused on the narrowness of her immediate timeframe. The horizon of Mrs. March's temporality is, in a sense, radically

contained by the necessities of the present. The way Howells feminizes Isabel's sense of the time with domestic concerns, he leaves Isabel temporal frame as a kind of nostalgic attachment that Basil is already prepared to dismiss. When Howells suggests that Basil reaches towards a futurity that distresses Mrs. March, who remains more comfortable in a present that March finds "deceitfully permanent," he intensifies the gendering of progressivity as male. Instead of theorizing a unified whole, the timelines that the husband and wife experience emphases discord rather than harmony in their union, which amplifies the uncertainty and non-alignment that results in their domestic upheaval.

The suspense the Marches feel while traveling allows them to consider the trajectory and context of their lives, but also to renegotiate the terms of their marriage. The domestic renegotiation scales outwards to impact their familial futurity more broadly: on the one hand, they muse over their shared past early in their marriage, and on the other, they reflect on the inexorable draw towards the future that they experience through their children. At first, they "escape for an hour into the carefree mood of their earlier travels, when they were so easily taken out of themselves" (33). Yet such reflections merely reinforce that this time their "youth" is behind them (33). In the ride to New York, the Marches' temporality is suspended between ruminations about their wedding journey and the futurity of their family life. Subsequently, they spend their travel consumed by "the anxieties that beset them" which predominantly concern their children, who "possessed them so intensely when present, and now, by a fantastic operation of absence seemed nonexistent" (33). When the narrator reports that they "owned a fascination with being alone; at the same time, they could not imagine how people felt who never had children," he indicates the two states of mind the Marches inhabit: one, a place of remembrance

of their past before offspring, the other an attachment to those offspring and the contingent obligations and anxieties (33).

Once in New York, the rupture in the family's cohesion looms large. As the Marches struggle to find permanent lodgings, they become increasingly depressed. Such reflections give way to the feeling of obligation to find a home and that it would be "demoralizing to board" for the children and dejecting to split the family apart (83). These domestic emphases provoke in March "pensive reveries of the past." March considers:

> [H]e still stood at the parting of the ways, and could take this path or that. In his middle life this was not possible; he must follow the path chosen long ago, wherever, it led. He was not master of himself, as he once seemed, but the servant of those he loved; if he could do what he liked, perhaps he might renounce this whole New York enterprise, and go off somewhere out of the reach of care; but he could not do what he liked, that was very clear. (83)

These middle-aged reflections suggest that Basil feels somehow static in his movement through life. The memories of the past and the draw of the future, in his reflection, leaves them entrapped in an intermediary space. Pushed to the side of these temporalities are his children, from whom both Isabel and Basil feel distanced and somewhat alienated. As such, the novel evokes a confluence of anxieties that persist over its course: to have the "future massed at a distance" is also to imagine a life separate from their own children from the present of their lives, a life that does not follow a predetermined trajectory of middle-class normative life and child-rearing. To detach the futurity that is concomitant with the growth and prospects of their children is also to upend the scripted pathway that organizes their shared trajectory.

With the children pushed to the side of their minds, the Marches open another space of renegotiation for their marital life, one that more explicitly raises the question of sexuality. The tacit admission that bourgeois domesticity and reproductive futurity are no longer either stable or of utmost relevance casts the Marches from the center of contemporary sociality. In their displacement, the novel recognizes other forms intimate relationships that evacuate the Marches of aesthetic novelty and relevance to a changing future. Age is not the only defining feature of the Marches staid normalcy. Their questionable marital vitality contrasts with sexual "savages" like Christina Dryfoos and Angus Beaton, or the potential eroticism of Alma Leighton's "shining ease and steely sprightliness" (118). Against a vivacious sexual backdrop, Howells allows their domestic instability to exude a feeling of "sex-weariness" that leaves the novel more broadly "without relief or resolution." (72). The exhaustion and the dampening of sexual feeling in their marriage makes it appear anesthetized when compared to other, livelier, examples that surround them. The Marches are comparatively out of circulation and out of value—they are in-between the vivacious sexual expression of their younger counterparts, and yet still within the game of reproductive normalcy, contributing to the nation and its prospects through the children that the novel holds at the periphery.[22]

The deceits of the present, and the deceits of normatively gendered heterosexual life have the cumulative effect of upsetting the assumptions on which narratives of progressive futurity more generally were based. Especially for Howells, for whom marital life represented the possibilities movement toward utopian through growth between men and women that scales to the society more generally, domestic heterosexual life had an important symbolic function.[23] The

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[22] Elizabeth Stevens Prioleau, *The Circle of Eros: Sexuality in the Work of William Dean Howells* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1983), 125.

[23] See Stein, "Marriage in Howells' Novels," 519.

effects of decentering stability of heterosexual romance, as a result, puts pressure on Lauren Berlant's assessment that "one of the main utopias is normativity itself."[24] As Berlant explains, normativity offers a "general condition of belonging and an aspirational site of rest and recognition by a social world" that plays an important role in marking membership within and exclusion from the surrounding environment.[25] By suggesting that fictional innovation lies not by depicting familiar, sanctioned relationships and romance, the Marches invite narratives of social and romantic relations that no longer intersect with what Berlant identifies as normative utopian offerings for desirable life. As such, they show a more complex vision of family-oriented futurity in the U.S. literary cannon. Howells, however, does not offer a clear alternative of what that utopian life might be. Though Howells' novel aligns with Berlant's observation that the "family form mediat[ed] national history" by "hold[ing] a wedge open for the future, for reproduction in all its senses—biological, political, economic, aesthetic," that wedge seems to hold open narrower passageway for the Marches, one beset by anxiety over its potential loss.[26] By decoupling marriage from the centrality of the novel's normalcy and futurity, that the Marches reevaluate their narratives of civic belonging in the present and suggest that those narratives had severe limitations.[27] Through their reflections on the intersection of marriage and the literary novelty suggests, Howells implies that the novel itself might reinvigorate its viability in the literary marketplace not by consolidating domesticity but by showing its fractures and

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[24] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 5.

[25] Ibid., 5.

[26] Ibid., 72.

[27] The ruptures to domesticity that they imagine do not extend so far as the queer futurity that Berlant suggests should be a mode for "establishing citizenship" that had been withheld. Ibid., 202.

alternative forms. To rely on those familiar forms would be, as March says, to be "imprisoned in the present," unable to adapt to evolving social conditions (51).

Replacing the clear script of heterosexual stability and growth with their entrapment in the present and their sexual enervation, Howells emphasizes the various "contingencies," uncertainty and social displacement that attend the Marches' movement to New York. Their crises center around economic stability, domestic insecurity, and the now porous boundaries that no longer separate the Marches and their middle-class identification from the characterless masses that, for Howells, are dangerously "embroiled in the struggle for mere life."[28] The disturbance prompts the couple to shift their aesthetic views to incorporate newer perspectives. Those changes, however, are hard won. Even from the novel's first pages, *Hazard* emphasizes the aesthetic complications of their domestic life, from the beginning register at the aesthetic level when March expresses "bitterness" towards his wife's disappointment at "giving up tastes" that were customary in Boston (20). By proposing anti-marriage as a concluding source of fictional novelty at the conclusion, the Marches dismiss their own recent experience as a valuable object of literary interest. The Marches' claim that their own lives would not be fictionally innovative if written about provides an ironic counterpoint to the novel's own focus on their marital life. Instead of suggesting that the novel as a genre should focus on ideological consolidation of domestic life, Howells invites the possibility that novelistic innovation should trace marriage's failures and limits through the Marches' ironic claim. In their transit from anxiety to dismissal of the marriage form as a novelistic investment, Howells imagines the breakdown of the domestic as a site of security and future success. Conversely, the novel invites

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[28] Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, 85.

alternative domestic forms rather than the homogeneity through which the Marches identify their social belonging.

2. Economic Security and the Politics of Novelty

The diminishment of Basil and Isabel March's marital and sexual value is but the start of a cascade of worries about their future. The confluence of diminished intimacy, financial insecurity, and domestic displacement amount to the expansion of contingency for the Marches—a contingency that leaves them both trapped in recurrent crises, increasingly separating the pair from the stability presumed in bourgeois life. Subsequently, they appear locked in uncertain present in multiple dimensions of their lives, from marriage and domesticity to economic security, such that the combination of uncertainties further decenters the couple from the symbolic representation of national futurity offered by the bourgeois heterosexual family. As the novel moves forward, new "question[s] of their own future" punctuate the novel's narrative development (389). With each developing question about the future, a feeling of stasis or recursion in the novel's plot takes over, rather than feelings of resolution or progress, in contradiction to the Howellsian theory of development, social reflection, and change. Much as the Marches are prevented from a clear sight of their destination or origin in their first journey to New York, March's description of the overwhelming present is the feeling that they are both displaced from the familiar narrative of steady progress that Basil's former job in Boston offered. Coupled with the continual financial worry that preoccupies the pair, feelings of stasis interrupt the forward trajectory of the Marches' life narrative, leaving them on untrodden ground to decide how they will fit into a world that no longer appears to provide a clear script for their future.

Where the move to New York marks one domestic and economic shift, the novel shifts its depiction of instability to the accruing challenges to the Marches' financial stability. Shortly after moving to New York, Howells puts the Marches through a second trial by destabilizing Basil's employment. From the start, Basil feels boxed in by his decision, discovering that he has less freedom in managing the magazine than he had believed. The move leaves Basil feeling trapped. As the position becomes clearer to him, March reevaluates his life. At their new lodgings, he "felt the forces of fate closing in around him" and suffers an "eclipse of the imagination . . . in which he could see no future for his desires" (82). In the uncertainty, both he and his wife are trapped by the horizon of the economic conditions and their family commitments that both work against the risks of the horizon that they literary endeavors might be able to imagine. But when March finally gets to work on the magazine itself, he feels a "serene happiness" and the prospect of "some fertile invention" that might stem from his new labors, shifting the language of his generativity from his family to his work. Planning the first iteration of the periodical, March begins to feel a creative impulse to document the lives that surround them, and imagines sketching New York in literary contributions to the periodical. He falls into a "life of comfortable reverie" at the prospect of the "heterogeneous forces" that he wishes document (172, 173).

That optimism, however, is short-lived. After the initial publication of the periodical that held a "novel fascination" for Basil, reviews in the press "seemed grudging and provisional," leaving March feeling that their endeavor is "condemn[ed] . . . for being novel" (173, 176). The negative reviews cause March to see "nothing but ruin ahead"; since *Every Other Week* had "become a very personal affair with the whole family," the children and parents alike fall into dep concerns about their prospects (177). Even as his employment at *Every Other Week* settles

in, however, Howells detonates its stability through an argument between Basil, the periodical's funder, Mr. Dryfoos (a natural gas magnate from the Midwest, and Fulkerson (an opportunistic entrepreneur), who advocates for a polemical strategy in the essays the periodical publishes. And it is here that Basil begins to understand how "his own life of comfortable reverie" competes with the circumstances of his current employment and the lives around him in the city that provide sites of his aesthetic fascination (172). The observation evokes a rising consciousness in Basil of the plight of labor, which encourages him to publish pieces by his friend, Berthold Lindau, a former member of the Union Army, who espouses radical socialist views that challenge March's own understanding of his life and economic position.[29]

Though March has a brief awakening about class politics, he quickly returns to his ambitious at *Every Other Week,* which themselves seemed stagnant. Though March had hoped the endeavor would provide something new in American letters, the publication itself beset by competing categories that pit novelty against marketability that emphasize its tenuousness and inability to push aesthetic boundaries. When March in accepting the job as editor since he joins Fulkerson in believing "the novelty of the thing would pique public curiosity," March commits to an idea of newness that is at once exciting for its opportunities and threatening for the social assumptions it means leaving behind (15). When Fulkerson relates the novelty of the biweekly to Dryfoos's own "picturesque past and his aesthetic present" as representing a "new thing" in literature, he seems to intensify the presentism of the journal as an endeavor upon which the various participants pin their futures (256). Moreover, *Every Other Week* seeks out the newness

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[29] As Rennick suggests, Civil War references in *Hazard* indicate a continuity across time of social crises in U.S. society, a continuity that structurally shapes the novel and its feeling of stasis. Rennick is more interested in the fact of these continuities than the novel's inability to progress beyond conflict, however. See Andrew Rennick, "'A Good War Story': The Civil War, Substitution, and the Labor Crisis in Howells' *A Hazard of New Fortunes,*" *American Literary Realism* 35, no. 3 (2003): 247–61.

in content, often to a fault. Fulkerson professes a deep interest in the “novelty” of the arguments of a Southerner, Colonel Woodburn, that the Southern system of slavery could be readopted to modern purposes to solve the current labor epidemic, in a bizarre effusion of regressive ideas as a source of the new (261). In response, March is a consummate skeptic. When Fulkerson, for example, celebrates the publication’s first successful week, March equivocates, saying that “at present, we’re a pleasing novelty rather than a fixed fact” (256). The excitement at the prospects offered by *Every Other Week* mix with a skepticism about its product. Intertwining the Marches domestic stuckness and the trenchant politics of the journal itself, Howells figure the periodical as a conduit between the domestic and the political both of which are trapped by antiquated ideologies (marriage and Civil War apologism) that signal the longevity of a violent past and the inability to transcend inherited conditions.

But the most significant rupture in Marches’ idea of economic security arrives after an argument between Lindau and Dryfoos over the damages of capitalism at a dinner amongst the periodical’s staff. After the argument, Dryfoos confronts the editors about the periodical’s direction. The conflict rises unexpectedly after Dryfoos, demands that March fire his friend Lindau for his extreme anti-capitalism. March, in a moral moment, refuses such a “degradation” of his principles of editorial independence by submitting to what Isabel calls Dryfoos’ “pecuniary interests” (321).[30] At first distraught at the prospect of March’s resignation so soon after their move, Isabel comes to see his potential unemployment as a positive possibility. When

[30] For Cynthia Stretch, the incident with Lindau represents a major crisis that places a limit on March’s political convictions, positioning March’s investments more in the realm of commerce than the artistic independence he otherwise claimed. The role of domestic futurity plays a role here, one that Stretch leaves unexamined. See Cynthia Stretch, “Illusions of a Public, Locations of Conflict: Feeling like Populace in William Dead Howells’ *A Hazard of New Fortunes*,” *American Literary Realism* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 233–46, 236.

the two decide that they could “build a future in which they easily lived on his income and on what March earned with his pen,” they feel “no chains” at the prospect of their separation from the base concerns of Dryfoos’ capitalism (323). At this juncture, March proposes embarking on an independent project in which March works on composing literary sketches of the city. In the disagreement, Howells mirrors the domestic concerns over the need for new representation of domestic life with a counterpart in print media, placing March between two competing ideological poles. In both spheres, Howells reemphasizes the feeling March’s life reverts to previous experiences of economic insecurity despite his new employment, replacing a narrative of growth with one of recurring instability. And yet at this juncture, their change in priorities links their domestic life to broader shifts in the media marketplace in a way that offers their builds their relevance in the literary marketplace to which they are newcomers. The Marches joint decision to pursue this particular form of writing shows not only how the domestic and literary tropes intersect, but also how the staid forms that the Marches see as normal and expected are moving out of public currency. March is not ultimately fired, however, in part because of a détente brokered by Fulkerson, and in part because of Lindau’s resignation. The promise of a novel aesthetic project falls into the background, and the pair return to a more familiar lifestyle. Yet the moment is instructive because Basil and Isabel position themselves as active contributors to the changing literary marketplace and cultural milieu in of New York.

In this context, March is oddly difficult to place: his employment and his desire to write something novel in the form of his sketches suggest he is at the *avant garde* of literary trends. And yet, his employment more generally represents the supremacy of a problematic political status quo due to his multiple institutional investments in marriage, stable employment, and middle-class political investments. The regressive tendency is most visible in the periodical’s

publication of regressive polemics such as those of Colonel Woodburn's Civil War fascination and in the anti-labor ideology of Mr. Dryfoos. Against that conservative ideology, Fulkerson and Basil and Isabel March begin to see March's sketches as a site of innovation that might push *Every Other Week* business success. These very features of the periodical's novelty turn into a withheld opportunity for March because of conflict between new aesthetic practices and regressive political investments. In the midst of these conflicting, regressive ideologies, March acts as a perhaps unwitting interlocutor, seeding the project more generally with a feeling of presentism and stasis that holds back the novelty of print media in representing and responding to the shifting territory of the present.

The withheld prospect of March's independence both economically and artistically is instructive. Instead of his experiencing a break in employment and that would inaugurate a radical new life for Basil and his family, Basil remains the editor of the politically problematic *Every Other Week*, leaving the family subject to the whims of their unstable employer. Meanwhile, the consistent offering and withholding of literary novelty might be leaves the Marches unable to break through the stasis of their bourgeois security. As such, the novel realizes neither familiar forms of marital security nor a form of futurity secured by innovative literary representation of nonstandard forms of domestic, cultural, and civic life. The general feeling is one of displacement and enervation. Howells describes how the Marches "no longer [have] the gross appetite for novelty which urges youth to a surfeit of strange scenes" (267) once they arrive in New York. Moreover, he details how March feels "something like an anachronism" as the editor of *Every Other Week* as the judge of the literary merit of works from much younger contributors (278, 277). Even earlier, when Isabel "lamented the literary peace, the intellectual refinement of the life they had left behind them," March retorts that such a

security “was not life—it was death in life” (20). And yet, for all they have given up in the move to New York, it is unclear what they have achieved. Nonetheless, against Isabel’s profession of an appreciation for literariness as a stable, aesthetic refinement and middle-class stability, Basil suggests that such values are regressive fantasies out of alignment with the modern world that the pair inhabit—they are a form of nostalgia about both modern life and literary value that must be transcended. As such, Howells situates their life and livelihood between the pragmatic concerns of the literary marketplace, and at an aesthetic divide separating the old from the new. The conflict leaves March unsure about relation to new trends in literate more generally in part because of the “anachronism” he feels in relation to the exciting work done by younger “realist” writers, even if Howells, in an editorial aside, suggests that such writers do not “know what realism was” (278). In the contrast, Howells places their aesthetic and economic priorities in a kind of unstable timeline, with the pair tied to the investments and stability of the present even while yearning for a future that they cannot quite realize.

3. New Citizens, Domestic Disturbances, and Literary Style

Despite the both personal and structural headwinds limiting March’s literary experimentation and independence, March nonetheless persists in his halting endeavors to contribute to modern literary style. Beginning as a hobby for March, sketches and observations allow him to imagine pushing *Every Other Week*’s aesthetic borders, differentiating realism from romanticism in ways that cut to the core of realism’s aesthetic genealogy and its claim to novelty. Though March’s wish to add vitality to *Every Other Week* in the form of documenting local life back to a readerly audience seems novel, it has a regressive streak: his hobby of drafting sketches of urban life does more to reinforce the limits of his bourgeois institutionalism

than to accurately document the political and social life of the city to which March himself is a newcomer. The composition of sketches of the scenes he observes across this unfamiliar city thus push the limits of two unsettled boundaries in the novel: one concerning what full economic membership looks like in the modern economy, and the other concerning the boundaries of respectable literary production that does not emphasize topics of domestic heterosexuality. A central component of these sketches has to do with the literary documentation of other modes of civil society than the domestic heterosexual life that was the predominant subject of reunion romance and the domestic topicality of realism more generally.[31] In ways that seem to express a realist aesthetic, March functions by observation when he celebrates the "citizen self-satisfaction of the crowd" which the city offers "for his inspection" from the rail lines (162). March's objective is to "make the comfortable people understand how the uncomfortable people live," which he frames as a kind of "picturesqueness" of the "low phases of life" (131). The attention to the democratized "the story of our own life" as it intersects with a broader public sphere is itself what Howells otherwise identifies in "Criticism and Fiction" the need for authenticity in realism.[32] The ways in which novelty for March becomes an aesthetic based on observation and fascination with the boundaries separating foreign difference from domestic familiarity indicates an expansion of the citizen-body more generally that registers in the object of literary study.

At the first, newness registers at the level of geographic distinction: to be American but not New Yorkers displaces the Marches' sense of belonging, excluding them from the polity whose changing nature they observe and find a site of a novelty with which they are at once imbricated and separate. These sketches divert attention away from the Marches' domestic and

[31] For more on domesticity and the postbellum fiction, see Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

[32] Howells, "Criticism and Fiction," 41.

economic concerns to their feelings of strangeness and foreignness in New York City, which converts their feeling of displacement into a broader question of belonging. The suggestion that literary sketches documenting the differences in ethnic, racial, economic, and romantic life in New York might provide the pair marital stability seems unexpected: Howells appears to suggest that realist fictionalization of everyday life, rather than ideologically investing in the conditions of stable domesticity, might instead benefit from depicting conditions quite different from the Marches' own bourgeois experience. The turn towards literary novelty as a kind of anthropology of New York's differences emphasizes the ways in which the urban life that surrounds them is moving towards a future in which they would no longer be the center representational model.

Even as they remain enamored with a city, Howells writes that that "their impressions of New York remained the same that they had been fifteen years before . . . Unchanged" even while their "chief pleasures" are from its "quality of foreignness" in part because they are "alien" to it (276, 267). Their difficulty in cataloguing the changes to a place that had always seemed impossibly different marks March's recognition of his anachronism—he wishes to catch up with a city that seems to have left him and the kind of citizen he represents behind. By making the Marches seem themselves relics of the past, Howells inverts narratives of national progress that depicted the heterosexual, bourgeois citizen as the forerunner of civilizational advancement. When Howells lexically yokes their status as internal national migrants to the conditions of the many disaffected poor that populate the city from numerous nations, he questions that vision of progress. When Howells writes that March "could not release himself from a sense of complicity" with the city, he also indicates that this complicity is not allayed no matter what "whimsical, or alien, or critical attitude he took" (276). In this vision, March begins to recognize his role in promoting the homogenization of new national subjects into alignment with the

heterosexual, bourgeois subject. It is that complicity that March imagines moving beyond. He begins to take a more passive, observational role and inhabits the city almost as a photographer or anthropologist. he documents the "frantic panorama" of the cityscape, jotting down "local studies" of the "volatility" of urban life and to the "aspects of our civilization" that seem to move the "ethnical character" from what is "foreign to them" to the ordinary American" qualities of life (164-65). In his observations, his own outlier status gives him the feeling of a "missionary quality" as he observes the heterogeneity of the street, the variegated character of its inhabitants (165). But these accumulated senses of differences and alienation break March's connection to his own country, figuring him instead as an interloper arriving in a strange land, a kind of neocolonial in the center of the city itself, as if repeating a colonizing mission. The image cuts two ways: it suggests March repeats past forms of violence on the space of the city he observes through his observation. But it also marks his own foreignness to the future of what the nation will become. Even in positioning himself in a metaphor of historic power, the way March documents New York also depends on his displacement form the membership that March, as a citizen, has himself inherited and upon which his placement in the civic fabric is dependent.

March's sketches in a sense document the failure of novelty to renew March's positon as a central representation of national futurity on the basis of the Protestant heterosexual family, or on the durability of "Boston style" (184). The way the sketches consume Basil's life emphasize how far they have come from their previous life in routines, domesticity, and economy. Where Isabel had earlier worried that the move would mark the "negation of motherhood" for her, March's movement even further into the public sphere re-emphasizes the rupture of the domestic (57). As a result, a central drama for March in the novel concerns the enduring authority of the institutions that structure his life—which play a substantive role in curtailing the transformative

future to which he imagines contributing. His sketches in effect mark a transference to new sites of productive futurity that are not genetic or familial. But this transfer causes a political stasis in the novel. This novelty depends on presenting the Marches outside of a sexual economy that is still contributing toward a national future. These encounters with foreignness leave March with a "willingness to abide the present" as he explores the city and observes the "picturesqueness" of Italians playing American games and the "spectacles of courtship" among the young immigrants of Washington Square (263, 269). Despite finding a "lingering quality of pure 'Americanism' in Greenwich Village," their encounters with the variegated populace of the city and the "foreign faces and foreign tongues" ultimately leaves "nothing menacing for the future in them" (269-70). March's observations focus on the novelty of a present made visible through the reproductive output of others, in effect displacing the Marches from the promise of the nation's future. After watching the courtship of young couples, the Marches retreat to the security of their domestic space, in a tacit acknowledgment of their own displacement. The characteristics that comprise New York's novelty do not include the Marches themselves, who seem to be intruders into an urban environment that favors the fertility and publicity of the "foreign" future. In fact, after "less than a year" of exposure to "heterogeneous" New York Mrs. March, formerly New York's greatest skeptic, becomes "afraid of her puritan Boston" instead, in a surprising revocation of her regional affiliations (279). And yet, the couple remain slow to change: in assimilating themselves, Mr. and Mrs. March adapt to the changes at hand, changes to which their own children have already acclimated.

As such, his sketches signify the evacuation of he and his wife's domestic aesthetic and emphasize the limitations of his own family in the face of the fertility of the foreign. What March identifies as the "frantic" of the city's "heterogeneous forces" ultimately registers at the

reproductive level of birth and inheritance (164, 173). There is a strong contrast between the familiar American and the variegated other. Traveling the subways, March observes:

> He found that, according to the hour, American husbands going to and from business, and American wives going to and from shopping, prevailed on the Sixth Avenue road, and that the most picturesque admixture to these familiar aspects of human nature were the brilliant eyes and complexions of American Hebrews, who otherwise contributed to the effect of well-clad comfort and citizen self-satisfaction of the crowd. (162)

In the itinerary of these variety of Americans, Howells documents a familiar scene, a kind of human nature comfortable for himself, recognizable by "citizen self-satisfaction." By contrast, his view changes when he meets Neapolitans:

> [They] were worked and fed and housed like beasts; and listening to the jargon of their unintelligible dialect, he had the occasion for pensive question within himself as to what notion these poor animals formed of a free republic from their experience of life under its conditions. (162)

The transition from the human to the animal startlingly separates the citizen from the foreign; and yet, March wonders how that reflects on the American republic more generally, questioning the ability of his own nation to rightly afford equal conditions to its new inhabitants as its old. Yet, in spite of the problems with the dehumanization of March's reflections and the seeming diminution of familiar bourgeois families, he retains a positive view of the way this heterogeneity will contribute to the country. When describing the "shabby adversity, which was almost always adversity of foreign birth" March becomes increasingly interested in the individual varieties of life he imagines in the people he observes, exchanging the story of his

own family with the fantasies of the others he views in passing (163). Observing differences in the Germans, Slavs, Mongolians, Russians, Czechs, and Chinese, March waxes poetic:

> [They] gave him abundant suggestion for the personal histories he constructed, and for the more public-spirited reveries in which he dealt with the future economy of our heterogeneous commonwealth. It must be owned that he did not make much trouble about this: what these poor people were thinking, hoping, fearing, enjoying, suffering; just where and how they lived; who and what they individually were. These were the matters of his waking dreams as he stared hard at them, while the train raced further into the gay ugliness. (163)

Even though the scenes he views prompt little more than flights of fancy and no direct motivation for political action, the March's vision shows a capacity for limited forward thinking. Most importantly, when March finds that the numerous people are "the future economy of our heterogeneous commonwealth," he aligns a national future to a "foreign birth" that seems to remarkably contrast with his wife's negated motherhood, a future that he hopes to make more broadly visible through his sketches (163). The difference is made stark when contrasted to the general invisibility of the March's own offspring throughout the majority of the novel, especially in that the Marches search for an apartment prioritizes lodgings that will benefit their children. The link between the political and the marital becomes at once explicit and problematic. While exploring what the Marches' own changing vision of what progressive future might look like, Howells simultaneously writes the Marches out of that very future. The political critique that Howells offers through the Marches lies here: their pragmatism indicates a surface level of racial and foreign sympathy that is belied by the conservative investments in the structures of the

institutions and politics that have supported their lives to this point more broadly, often to the detriment of other racial, ethnic, and national groups without equal political representation.

To combat the ossification that threatens his marriage and his position as an editor at *Every Other Week*, March's sketches offer an aesthetic novelty that demands a physical separation from his wife, allowing March to forgo the domestic in favor of other attachments outside the confines of contractual marriage. March's feeling of anachronism—of being too tied to the past while reaching for a future that operates under different assumptions—motivates this quest for newness, which scales outwards, impacting his sense of domestic, economic, and artistic identification, prompting him to re-invent himself. The drive to observe emerges in an effort to reclaim vitality even while the modes by which his vitality should be secured—his family and marriage—fade from his focus. March's efforts reflect the way that, as Michael David Bell writes, the conservative nature of Howellsian realism depends on a "to transform the 'artist' into a 'man.'"[33] For March, who spends the novel traversing the city exploring what are to him novel cultures and social conditions, the idea of stepping away from domestic security reinvigorates his prospects of literary relevance. That promise, however, is conflicted. When Isabel indicates that she fears March's travel throughout the city in search of scenes to document, his marriage itself emerges as a restriction on artistic novelty. In this way, *Hazard*, offers something different from Howells' usual mode—the denouement of marriage and of the masculine-feminine conflict that the Marches express as a potential site of commercially successful art.

In this sense, *Hazard* describes March's desire for a novelty that his institutional obligations as a middle-aged member of the bourgeoisie constantly thwart him from executing.

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[33] Michael Davitt Bell, *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 35-37.

Though Mrs. March eventually acquiesces to March's project, their earlier division pushes March's aesthetic further away from domestic security and towards an almost lurid fascination with foreignness, interrupting his familial futurity. Much as March feels indeterminate because of his own family's placement within a narrative of growth is no longer stable, he finds himself torn between an idea of inherited privilege and a strange fraternity with the communities whose own position in the nation's growth is unstable or insecure. March acknowledges the rupture between his own political ideology and his attitude towards his children when he reports that "We dare not teach them otherwise, for fear they may falter in the fight when it comes their turn and the children of others will crowd them out of the palace into the poor house" (397). Though Charles Harmon claims that "the novel ends with the implication that all the elements of March's liberalism have been accurately reproduced" in his children, the almost universal absence of Tom and Bella from the novel appears ambiguous. Instead of securing a liberal future through his children, their disappearance suggests a political separation from the future that March attempts to imagine by wandering the city and cathecting its future on its variegated inhabitants..[34] The reader does not, in fact, know, and cannot know beyond the temporal frame of the novel, to what extent Tom and Bella will inherit the political failings and resolution of their father and mother.[35] As such, the wish to pass on his political proclivities marks the fragmentation of the novel's ideology in terms of a breach in the continuity between parents and offspring, a rupture that disconnects the political unity of the family. This is a tension that is inextricably tied to the temporal horizons that contextualize democracy more broadly. It is what Russ Castronovo

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[34] Charles Harmon, "*A Hazard of New Fortunes* and the Reproduction of Liberalism," *Studies in American Fiction* 25, no. 2 (Autumn 1997): 183–105, 193.

[35] Ibid., 193.

indicates is the need of democracy to "keep pace with the continual unreeling present of the crowd," even if at the expense of the family unit.[36]

The replacement of domestic futurity with an embeddedness in the urban crowd, however, has its limits. In fact, March seems unable to feel more than a fascination for what the novelty of documenting the public could afford for him personally. That limit re-situates readers in another form of stasis, in that March's feelings rarely last. For Mr. March, an inability to properly scale his feelings of sympathy for the poor and the dispossessed in New York is a problem of presence and duration. As Melanie Dawson writes, his feelings provide "the kind of specificity he can only trust when attached to his immediate situation, rendering feeling a consequence of immediate and personal proximity."[37] Dawson indicates that March's politics can only be sustained for an "immediate time"; while a part and parcel of this immediacy is spatial (being around the impoverished or dispossessed), another part is a temporally discontinuous emotion. March only "feels" in immediate moments, leaving those affects to lapse. Similarly, Isabel cannot connect the needs for persistent sympathy with the anonymous poor in more than a superficial fashion. Instead, her limits in sympathy indicate what Dawson calls a static politics: she writes that Mrs. March's "impossible question about giving up affluence for the teeming numbers of the poor highlights the ways in which ongoing, large-scale demands for social equity became an argument for stasis: sympathy was too large a project to contemplate."[38] Between the two, an inability to scale feelings from the immediate to the broadly defined social

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[36] Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 97.

[37] Melanie V. Dawson, *Emotional Reinventions: Realist-Era Representations Beyond Sympathy*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 54.

[38] Ibid., 55.

sphere indexes a problem of temporal stasis: both Mr. and Mrs. March are trapped in a moment that they cannot transcend because that means abandoning or reevaluating their conceptions of the past in order to manage a future that would demand they themselves change.

In the process, literary novelty takes the place of reproductive futurity and domestic fertility: as a site of aesthetic novelty, it invites its own erotic investments in the form of observing the intimacy of civic others, which in turn implies the evacuation of the bourgeois marriage (most especially with the Marches) as a site of sexual possibility, completing a circuit between dangers to the Marches project of literary novelty and dangers to their marital future. *A Hazard of New Fortunes* marks a break in Howells' theory of social progress, in which the discontinuity between the past and the present is no longer a clear source of innovation and progress, but a moment of crisis that appears through domestic conflicts and through the minimization of bourgeois reproductive futurity. Instead, an eroticized fascination with changes in the civic body more generally replaces the rhetorical investment in the family unit. When analyzing the role of the mass subject and the crowd in the novel, Castronovo observes how in *Hazard* "the mass subject disappears from view, leaving Howells and his readers with only a wishy-washy ("this character . . . and sometimes that") sense of direction that looks a lot like immobility."[39] For Castronovo, immobility is central because "the hazard of literature is nothing less than this negation: in imagining a potential world of different choices and new outcomes, literature may be forced to say that such possibilities will never come to pass." [40] In Castronovo's articulation, the political time of the novel is one trapped by the very programmatic functioning of the democratic imaginary that it is at once shaped by and attempts to shape. The

[39] Castronovo, *Necrocitizenship*, 105.

[40] Ibid., 105.

mass public—which, in Howells' vision has no clear ties to kinship, lineage, or property—indicates a form of democracy whose family-based futurity no longer appears to be the operative metaphor for the nation more generally.[41] Most importantly, the displacement of the reproductive, bourgeois family circulates through the very vessel that for March is the purported site of novelty in literature, which simultaneously dislocates both him and his family from the representative form of national futurity itself.

4. Civic Rupture and the Reassertion of the Domestic Present

The tensions between the domestic family and the aesthetic novelty of the heterogeneous city culminate in the novel's depiction of a violent strike. This civic rupture explodes the March family's symbolic displacement outward to impact the novel's other storylines, disrupting the continuity of heterosexual and family futurity across the novel's network of characters. The strike scene, in which Basil observes an outburst of police violence that results in the shooting death of Conrad Dryfoos and the fatal wounding of Lindau by the city police, ruptures the boundaries between the lower, middle, and upper classes (i.e., between the groups March documents, March himself, and the Dryfoos family). The riot also represents the final collapse of the domestic and romantic futures in the novel across the entire set of the novel's character groups: Conrad's death at the hands of the police prompts the Dryfoos family to depart New York for Europe, representing the collapse of their family's upward trajectory; his death forecloses the possibility of a next generational romance because Margaret Vance, who had an affection for Conrad, joins a nunnery to continue Conrad's activist work, foreclosing her

[41] Deak Nabors suggests that mass culture in the novel shows an imbalance between social custom and political agency, a rivalry that the novel does not resolve. See Nabers, "The Novel and the Police Power," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 64, no. 1 (June 2009): 76–107, 79.

romantic future; and, finally, the novel leaves Angus Beaton, the artist at *Every Other Week* who had courted Alma Leighton and the Dryfoos daughters, rejected and cynical about women. Disrupting each of these romantic plot lines, the political event erupts in the novel, prohibiting a clean, normative resolution of the novel's competing plot lines. The violent arrival of the strike, in its disturbance of family, romance, and domestic economy, ruptures the novel's narrative trajectory by endangering the novel's investments in kin, domesticity, and romance. In the aftermath, Howells leaves the novel no clear path forward for any of its characters other than a predominant sense of loss and instability. After the loss of domestic tranquility, of romantic futures, and of children alike, the characters seem set adrift, without a clear script to guide their futures, without a pathway towards resolution for the conflicts that had motivated the novel's plot.

At the level of form, the strike represents the problem of the present in its sheer suddenness: it breaks apart the otherwise relatively linear progression of the novel's plot and forces the experience of a multi-focalized present into a novel that otherwise progresses more or less chronologically in each chapter. With the riot, various threads of the novel intersect, and Howells documents the overlapping descriptions of the exact same moment in time when Angus Beaton, March, Conrad, and Miss Vance converge on the Union Square area, observe the riot break out, and witness its violent aftermath. By moving between the perspective of Beaton, the novel's representative of artistic contemporaneity, March, who seeks out the violence of the strike in order to document it in his sketches, and a scene of violent disagreement between Dryfoos and his son, Conrad, Howells traces multiple political, familial, and romantic perspectives as they relate to and react to the street violence of the labor riot.[42] These threads of

[42] Kaplan, *Social Construction*, 61.

the novel, then, inhabit a shared present moment across multiple chapters, envisioning a nearly simultaneous moment of the strike from different perspectives. The intersection of perspectives effectively pauses the narrative's temporality: as Kaplan observes, "at no other moment in the novel is narrative time suspended in this way."[43] The "splicing of scenes" that occurs over the chapters is a narrative innovation for Howells in the way it ties together multiple perspectives to illustrate a shared moment of social rupture.[44] At the center of this disruption, Howells breaks down the putative separation of class, civic status, and social custom and creating a mass polity. He does so in his most striking statement about time in the novel: the vantage points on a shared present formally attach Howells' broader concern over stasis with the violence the scenes depict, lodging the narration in a shared moment of trauma from which the novel never recovers.

Though the strike is about mass political change, its functions in the narrative are tied to domestic concerns. In addition to rupturing the narrative emplotment of the novel, which focused largely on the domesticity of the Marches' lives and that of the various families surrounding them, the novel also kills one of the novel's few examples of progressive family and economic futurity with the death of Conrad Dryfoos. Not only does Conrad's death interrupt the narrative of progressive growth and American success symbolized by Dryfoos' rise from immigrant roots to capitalist power, it breaks the idea that the family's lineage will continue Dryfoos' rise. Moreover, Conrad's death impacts the novel's reproductive futurity by prompting Margaret Vance, his only love interest, to remove herself from sexual circulation by entering a nunnery following his death. As such, domestic and family drama are fundamental to the way the strike functions as an affective moment especially because of the threats to family futurity that the

[43] Ibid., 60.

[44] Ibid., 61.

strike causes. As a result, any revelation about public politics that might come from the violent disruption of the strike is rapidly enfolded within the bourgeois concerns that had governed the novel writ large. The return of these domestic threads at the most public moment of Howells' novel has a counterintuitive function: it re-centers the novel around domestic and romantic dramas as a way of understanding public crisis.

The resurgence of the domestic is missing from Kaplan's observation about narrative fragmentation. The strike does more than, as Kaplan claims, "suddenly defamiliarizes the family unit, and renders it as alien and threatening as the surrounding unreal city": it prohibits that family unit from recovering security and futurity from the traumatized characters. Moreover, the strike convenes family experience in a shared moment of the present, radically reshaping the progressive time owed to normative heterosexual domesticity. The strike not only acts the novel's denouement: it reverses the functional network of domestic, aesthetic, and political concerns and re-instantiates the domestic as the main object of the novel's focus. It also marks the diminution of those narratives as operative modes for considering political futurity more broadly. The family is not merely defamiliarized in the face of the heterogeneous city; it is displaced and destabilized, even while it rises as a source of readerly empathy and concern. Where the novel had been converging the plots of its various families on this one violent scene, subsequently the novel retreats to these various separate domestic plots, fraying the continuity of the narrative even further, as each of the individuated families struggles to understand their lives after this violent rupture to their bourgeois order. While Howells returns to domestic attachments, however, those attachments to kin and family no longer retain the same draw to a promised, stable future.

The collapse of heterosexual futures begins in earnest when Angus Beaton, the illustrator and artistic face of *Every Other Week*, travels back to the periodical's office after having been turned away from the Dryfoos household for his unwelcome courtship of Christine Dryfoos, signifying the inauspicious end to his efforts at courtship. The strike interrupts Beaton's reflections on the sting of his rejection and failed romance, leaving him in "the tide of his confused and aimless reverie" while he waits for the arrested streetcar. When a nearby policeman jokes that the car will be coming "in about a week" as a humorous rebuttal to the "general sarcasm" of Beaton's tone when he enquires about the train, Howells interrupts the assumed romantic plot; he also literally suspends Beaton's movement in space and time, causing him to be stuck in place as well as in the trajectory of his romantic emplotment. Enraged at being "inconvenienced by the strike and obscurely connecting it as one of the series of wrongs he had suffered at the hands" of the women who have pushed him away, Beaton expostulates that "to shoot" the strikers would "save a great deal of bother," quickly transforming his private frustration to a public form of violence (268). The slippage between Beaton's romantic failure and his condemnation of the strike becomes ominous given the "rather impressive" presence of "a policeman at every corner" of the "silent" avenue, a detail that Beaton only passingly observes in his personal frustration (368). The way in which the silence and stasis of the strike arrive in the novel unannounced emphasizes the radical rupture that the strike causes, amplifying the novel's accruing sense of presentism that is political, romantic, and domestic.

Following Beaton's abjection and anger, the next chapter shifts to the offices of *Every Other Week*. This chapter inhabits the simultaneous moment with Beaton's own anger and sense of loss. Changing focalization to Basil March, Howells documents how March and his peers discuss the failure of arbitration between laborers and the rail company, prompting March to

wonder how a public tribunal declared "itself powerless" to address the conditions leading to the strike (370). Wishing to understand the conditions on the ground, March sets out to the scene of the disruption, which for him present an opportunity to publish an account of the "foreigners" in protest (372). Because "Mrs. March's eye was not on him," March ventures out in the street, "curious" about the "great social convolution" despite that "he had promised his wife solemnly that he would keep away" from the "more violent phases" of public action (373). By breaking his promise to Isabel, March breaks a domestic contract, inserting a fissure between him and Isabel at the center of his involvement in the public dispute, mirroring the fissure in romance that Beaton's arrival at the scene of the strike represents.

After positioning his desire to document the scene ahead of his promise to Isabel, March undergoes a shift in his public perspective by becoming a member of the mass democracy he has up to now aestheticized. But March's observational interest in neutral observation is quickly replaced in this instance by March's feeling of absorption within a mass populace, shifting his feeling of bourgeois belonging to a broader form of community that also erases his independence. When March grabs a "police-laden" street car and "began to feel like populace" even as "he struggled with himself and regained his character as a philosophical observer," the dynamics of power at play become clear (374). In effect, March's "feeling like a populace" is tied to his being out of his "wife's eye": this break from his promise to his wife structurally reflects Beaton's own encounter with the strike. To be in the present is also to inhabit a breaking point with the relationships of these men to their domestic attachments (either desired or actual) that bubbles into their encounters with what it means to be a public citizen.

In one sense, March wish to become part of a mass public and yet to retain the privileges that individuate his class status illustrates the irresolvable tensions of the novel and its failures in

imagining a broader coalition outside of the bourgeois values of the March family.[45] Though March feels mass membership when he is suddenly thrown in the middle of the strike, March feels a part of a political group in a way that has meaning because his proximity to but separation from its violence. At this very moment, perhaps a textbook example of Althusserian interpellation, the streetcar conveying March "stopped with so quick a turn of the brake that he was half thrown from his seat," and March becomes aware that he himself is a part of the very scene from which he wishes to be independent.[46] In effect, he becomes aware of himself as a surveilled subject without the protections of his bourgeois status and individuation. As the violence that interrupts the bizarre "quiet" on the East Side that stands in the face of the westward "fighting [that] was reported to have taken place," places and regions of New York draw together, and March becomes an unwilling part of that movement (374).[47] The drama of feeling like a populace while trying to retain one's individual character positions one's unique privileges and immunities against the absorption of one's individuality within mass social membership that is subject to public control and police management.

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[45] The completeness of March's absorption within a public is questionable. As Cynthia Strech argues, March's convictions are so unstable that they threaten to unravel the very investments in democratic society that Howells holds dear. What Strech downplays, however, is the role of the domestic in March's separation from the public; he remains ideological connections to his family status and owed futurity that both he and the novel find difficult to disavow. See Cynthia Stretch, "Illusions of a Public", esp. 237.

[46] Christopher Raczkowski discusses March's involvement in the scene as a kind of "ontological shock," but over-reads the moment as a kind of "labor pains of birth" of the labor movement itself. The shock Raczkowski describes here is useful, nonetheless, because it emphasizes the need for political action. March's feeling of isolation, however, disappears when he returns to the safe confines of his domesticity. Christopher Raczkowski, "The Sublime Train of Sight in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*," *Studies in the Novel* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 285–307, 296.

[47] Althusser famously demonstrates the process of becoming visible to the state with the example of a police officer hailing an individual and thereby constituting them as a subject vis a vis state power. See Louis Althusser et al., *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London: Verso, 2014).

These seemingly minor disturbances reach a catastrophic conclusion that shatters the remainder of the novel with the death of Conrad Dryfoos, an event preceded by Howell's most moralizing intervention: the conflict between Conrad Dryfoos and his father. Presaging the violence that follows in the subsequent chapter, this conflict occurs at both the domestic and political level. It begins with an argument between Conrad and his father over their political differences. These affairs appear an anomaly to Dryfoos:

> The strike seemed a very far-off thing, though the paper he bought to look up the stock market was full of noisy typography about yesterday's troubles on the surface lines [leaving] the millionaires in Wall Street . . . joking, but not thinking about the six thousand men who had taken such chances in their attempt to better their condition (376).

Dryfoos' anger with the critical view expressed in the paper explodes into a conflict with Conrad, whom Dryfoos meets at the offices of *Every Other Week*, placing the publication at the center of media representation, political conflict, and domestic violence. When Conrad confesses that he believes "they have a righteous cause, though they go the wrong way to help themselves," his father explodes (379). As if inaugurating public violence, Dryfoos "lifted his hand and struck his son in the face. Conrad caught his hand with his own left, and while the blood began to trickle from a wound . . . he looked at him with a kind of grieving wonder" (379). When Dryfoos flees the office, "he only saw Conrad's mild, grieving, wondering eyes, and the blood slowly trickling from the wound in his temple" (380). Dryfoos' sudden eruption of anger and abuse anticipates the public rupture, presaging Conrad's public death with an incident of domestic violence.

Organizationally, the chapter depicting Dryfoos' violence takes readers to the moments immediately preceding March's dramatic interruption on the train. The chapter following this dispute brings readers in alignment with March's encounter with the riot itself. Howells' narration reaches back analeptically the domestic violence, shading it with the political aura of the public dispute and breaking down the barrier between the domestic and the political that had left Dryfoos enraged with his son. The portrayal of the domestic conflict between Dryfoos and his son immediately follows after March had "just left" the offices of *Every Other Week* in order to observe the riot, leads readers to the chapter in which Conrad is shot and killed. Conrad and Dryfoos's fight leaves Conrad wandering the streets in search of the strikers, in a simultaneity that brings March and Conrad's temporal streams into a violent alignment, catastrophically rupturing any sense of stability in the text.

Yet, as these narrations intersect, Howells offers one last, sorrowful portrayal of the potential for heterosexual futurity. Immediately before March happens upon Conrad as he is shot, Howells describes a chance encounter with Margaret Vance that leaves Conrad in a state near beatification. When the couple meet, Miss Vance sympathizes with Conrad's politics: she declares that the strikers "are risking all they have in the world for the sake of justice" and notes that they "are staking the bread of their wives and children on the dreadful chance they've taken" (3181). When she declares that she knows Conrad "feel[s] as I do," she verifies the righteousness of Conrad's convictions (382). Conrad, wounded by his father, can merely agree, and departs Margaret's company feeling elated by her contact, "as if he mounted upon the air" and with a hart "full of joy, it leaped, he thought it would burst" (382). The prospect of Margaret's sympathies induces a shared intellectual relation that "filled him with love that cast out the pain and shame he had been suffering" (382). This is an intimacy of an intellectual kind, one that

replaces the loss Conrad feels of his kinship with his father. Where the Dryfoos family's ties fray, Margaret provides Conrad a kind of sympathy and pleasure that bolsters his political convictions and demonstrates the novel's most sentimental romance, a connection between a man and a woman pure in intention and politics.

The enjoyment of an intellectual connection with Margaret proves fleeting. While "thinking of her pleasure in what he was about to do, following Margaret's inspiration that Conrad intervene in the strike, he "looked up and down to see if there was any turbulent gathering of men, whom he might … keep from violence" but finds none (385). The abutting scenes attach Conrad's romantic encounter with Margaret, as close as the novel comes to verifiable shared sentiments, and they lead directly to the extinguishing of the novel's one romance. The placidity of the scene changes "suddenly, as if at the same moment" when in a "dreamlike simultaneity" comes a "tumult of shouting, cursing, struggling men" (383). The eruption rapidly becomes violent; as "a squad of policemen leaped out and began to club the rioters," Conrad is shot as he tries to object to the beating of March's friend Lindau, who has just appeared. The scene of his wounding reinforces the surprise of the momentary: Conrad realizes that "he could not move his tongue" and sees the police man who had the "Face of a statue, fixed, perdurable, a mere image of irresponsible and involuntary authority" (383-84). The moment of Conrad's death appears as a frozen-frame, a literally stuck moment in which state power becomes immensely intimate. When March arrives "at the same moment he saw Lindau drop under the club of the police officer," the varied time sequences of Howells's chapters finally converge (384).

The convergence seems incomprehensible to March: he describes how "something stronger than his will drew him to the spot, and there he saw Conrad dead beside the old man"

(384). The suddenness of the event, the rapidity of the disappearance of the crowd, and the swift movement of Basil March from being one of the "populace" to being the most intimate observer of the death of Conrad and the fatal wounding of Lindau cause a rapid conflation the various strands of the novel's present into a poignant loss. The affective resonance is partially caused by the rupture between the public and the private, which quickly subsides allowing the domestic to be reasserted. It is also partially in the temporal compression that the narrative stages between various scenes with their various forms of affective tie to romantic interests: Beaton's failed romantic endeavor, Conrad's elation at his contact with Miss Vance, March's guilt at breaking a promise with his wife. That Howells represents these intersecting strains through a simultaneous present that traces the failures of heterosexual romance shows the evacuation of heterosexual modes of civic membership. Instead of stabilizing social and civic membership, these scenes of domestic and social rupture leave the novel uncertain about the future that follows.

After this dramatic eruption of the strike, the thee chapters immediately following ease off the suddenness of violence. In the process, they dramatize the narrowing of potential resolutions for the novel by describing domestic breaks and lingering on the quiescence of the city as a public space. Howells' novel ends with the return of the domestic, but it is a domestic fractured into many factions. And yet, the return to the domestic at the novel's end is more than just the splintering of the novel into a variety of competing conclusions: it represents a disengagement from the radical potentiality of the strike's brief mass membership. Domesticity survives here because of the way heterosexual normalcy more generally deeply structures how Howells builds the affective impact of the strike's melodramatic break. As Paul Abeln notes, the connection between the novel's political failures connects with the resurgence of the domestic. In the case of the Marches especially, Abeln suggests that the violence is "perpetually diminished . .

. and translated into the narrow scope of Isabel's private universe" following the scene of the riot.[48] In Abeln's view, the strike is only noticeable because its violence interrupts the romantic and sexual attachments of the Marches, such as they are.[49] In fact, the impacts are much broader, impacting the prospects of romance, domestic security, and reproductive futurity for the Dreyfoos family, for Angus Beaton, and for Miss Vance alike, for each of whom the prospects of a normalized heterosexual futurity like that of the Marches' disappears. In this sense, Howells' rupture of heterosexual progress is total, leaving the novel without a chart or pathway by which its characters might progress. Despite Howells' claim that "the story began to find its way and issues larger than those of love and affairs common to fiction," those same issues contextualize the novel's political inflections.[50] By imagining the riot as a sudden explosion of violence from below that disrupts the demarcation line of class and social group, Howells returns to the domestic space as an interpretive rubric. And yet those domestic spaces are deeply structured by the trauma of mass violence. In their aftermath, the very ephemerality of feeling like a mass public itself becomes a present that lingers, one that casts a long-lasting shadow over the families and their futurity.

The Persistence of the Present

The novel never recovers from the trauma of this violent present. At the level of form, the simultaneity of these few chapters constricts time horizon of the novel, making the focus on the present occlude the vision of a resolved outcome. Much as William James describes the present

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[48] Paul Abeln, *William Dean Howells and the Ends of Realism*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 44.

[49] Qtd. in Abeln, *Ends of Realism,* 35.

[50] Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism*, 60.

as being “gone in the instant of our becoming,” the families seem transformed and changed by the riot and yet separate from it, once again individuals apart from the masses with which they were briefly members, impacted by the encounter yet unable to articulate that impact fully.[51] In order to process the novel’s splintering, Howells leaves us at its origins: in the presence of the Marches, who find themselves at the center of the novel’s many dramatic losses. Howells explores the instability they feel, the different kind of present they now inhabit. Where March was “of so much use from the instant of the calamity” he had “suffered incomparably” as a result, returning the couple to the “question of their own future” (389). Basil and Isabel “postpone” such questions, however, on the arrival of Miss Vance, who in conversation confesses that she barely saw Conrad “more than half an hour” before his death, at which point she claims that she feels to have “lived a lifetime since it—happened” (389). These reflections on the temporality of their shared loss—the proximity and simultaneity of their experience, the endurance of trauma in their lives—is one of the features that trap the remainder of the novel in a present moment shaped by trauma and loss, with no clear pathway for resolving the conflicts that brought them to this juncture. The novel recirculates feelings of loss, of trauma, and of insecurity, and holds at bay any sense of progress, development, or transcendence.

Ending the novel in a sense where it began with the Marches, the novel winnows its plots away. In a final moment, the Marches watch the Dryfoos’ embark for Europe and Mr. and Mrs. Fulkerson leave on a honeymoon that traverses “the line of travel that the Marches had taken in their wedding journey,” with Fulkerson even traveling on “the same boat on which he first met March” (447). The repeat of the Marches’ journey returns the novel to familiar terrain. After a “brief summer outing they permitted themselves” they find Margaret Vance “in the dress of the

[51] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 147.

sisterhood" and "felt the peace that passeth understanding had looked at them from her eyes" (449). Miss Vance herself seems to emblematize that sense of stasis. Having entered a nunnery, she has removed herself from sexual and romantic circulation following the beatified death of Conrad. Howells offers this one potential romantic pairing that could have merged romance with social empathy and a belief in political progress, and then withholds its promises, leaving the foreign masses as the standard bearer of national reproduction that the bourgeois classes, in their retrograde investments and politics, no longer represent.[52] The novel concludes with a sense that the Marches have not progressed and that the generation represented by Miss Vance and by the Dryfoos children will not participate in the same style of life and economy by which the Marches themselves grew up and expected to pass down.

The connective tissue stitching these disparate moments together even as they intersect is the shared domestic rupture: first, between Beaton and his chosen object of desire, then between March and his wife, and finally between Conrad and his father; second, by offering a small possibility, quickly revoked, is the briefly shared intimacy between Miss Vance and Conrad. This crisis in the text is also the most nuanced in terms of the novels narrative form; it is when the emphasis on the momentary appears to heighten these various strands of the novel's representative structure, of its way of engaging with the personal and the political simultaneously. And it is after this shocking turn that we find Howells' narrator reflect as each of the families morn. When the narrator writes that "we are creatures of the moment; we live from one little space to another, and only one interest at a time fills these," Howells leaves the reader suspended in an aggregate of disconnected moments with no clear trajectory between them or to the future (385).

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[52] For a discussion of the ends of progressivity because of Conrad's death and Vance's cloistering, see Abeln, *Ends of Realism*, 46.

Throughout the text Howells emphasizes life movement from moment to moment and forces his readers to encounter the violence of that momentary and "specious present" through the scene of the strike. In aggregate, the novel evokes a break with historical continuity, and thereby refuses to endorse any particular pathway to social change. Contrary to what Lukács had described as the role of the historical novel to make visible contemporary ideology by reinforcing a sense of the historical past in the relations depicted in a literary text, here that past is not only abruptly recent but impossible to see beyond.[53] When Howells writes that the current "movement in literature . . . could no more turn back and be of the literary fashions of any age before this than we could turn back and be of its social, economical, or political conditions," he indicates a faith in social progress that is difficult to square with the affects expressed in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*.[54] Conversely, being unable "to see how very recent the past is," as March says, the novel cannot but reflect on that past as a pervasive affective state that simultaneously seems out of reach (399). It is an experience of the past that does not translate into a visible political program or pathway to change. *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, rather than showing relations as they are so that readers might shape what will become, lingers on the conditions that do not change, on the brief space we inhabit that renders the aspiration for the future always on an unreachable horizon. In so doing, he places the union as a symbol of U.S. progress under further scrutiny without offering a plausible alternative.

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[53] György Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

[54] Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, 69.

Chapter 3

Charles Chesnutt's The Marrow of Tradition *and the Racialization of Progress*

> *I have been reading Charles Chesnutt's* The Marrow of Tradition*. You know he is a Negro, though you wouldn't know it from seeing him, and he writes of the black and white situation with an awful bitterness. But he is an artist almost of the first quality; as yet too literary, but promising things hereafter that will scarcely be equaled in our fiction. Good Lord! How such a Negro must hate us. And then think of the Filipinos and the Cubans and Puerto Ricans whom we have added to our happy family. But I am talking treason.*[1]
> —William Dean Howells

> *It is by far the best thing I have done, and is a comprehensive study of racial conditions in the South . . . It is, in a word, our side of the Negro question, in popular form.*[2]
> —Charles Chesnutt in a letter to Booker T. Washington

Along with William Dean Howells, Charles Chesnutt shared a belief that literary fiction can intervene productively in the nation's social life.[3] The imperative both authors expressed, however, substantially differed in the systematic problems they addressed in tumultuous times. Where Howells's *A Hazard of New Fortunes* reflected on the disorder prompted by the labor unrest in Chicago of the 1886 Haymarket Riot*,* Chesnutt wrote of much deeper inequities than the comparatively recent rise of labor strife. Fictionalizing a violent white uprising against and massacre of black residents in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1898, his 1901 novel *The Marrow*

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[1] Qtd. in Matthew Wilson, *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004).

[2] Charles W Chesnutt, Joseph R McElrath, and Robert C Leitz, *"To Be an Author": Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt, 1889-1905*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 159.

[3] For further discussion of Chesnutt's interest literature's social imperative, see Daylenne English's discussion of how literature for Chesnutt played an "instrumentalist role" that is channeled through realist fiction's ambition to "reflect a national reality." Daylanne English, *Each Hour Redeem: Time and Justice in African American Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 56.

of Tradition attempted to bring the experience of racial terror to a broad audience of U.S. readers. Echoing the Howellsian claim that literature can bringing men together in sympathy, Chesnutt suggested that fiction possessed a "faculty of persuasion . . . by which men's hearts are reached . . . and the currents of life directed."[4] Behind the gesture to persuasion, however, Chesnutt calibrated his fiction more carefully: his aim was "not so much the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites."[5] In this vein, *Marrow* addressed the Wilmington massacre and systemic racism not just to convince white audiences of the facts of events. As Ryan Simmons suggests, the novel emphasizes the emotional impacts of racial violence in order to challenge white readers to do more than sympathize with the cause, but to act.[6] To produce that emotional impact, Chesnutt differed from Howells in strategy. Rather than focusing on bourgeois marriage that so animated Howell's fiction, he centered the drama of *Marrow* around a more vulnerable unit within the family: the child, and in this case, the different futures afforded to black and white children.

From the first pages of *The Marrow of Tradition*, the white child quickly comes to illustrate the structural privileges that accrue not only to whiteness but to the reproductive futures secured unequally for white citizens. Chesnutt's attachment between the child and the systems of white reproductive futurity emerge almost immediately: when introducing one of his primary characters, Major Carteret, the owner and editor of the premiere newspaper in the fictional town

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[4] Charles Chesnutt, "Literature in Its Relation to Life," 1899. In *Charles Chesnutt: Essays and Speeches*, ed. Joseph McElrath Jr., Robert C. Leitz II, and Jessee S. Crisler. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 114.

[5] Qtd. in William Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 13.

[6] Ryan Simmons, *Chesnutt and Realism: A Study of the Novels*, Studies in American Literary Realism and Naturalism (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 95.

of Wellington, North Carolina, Chesnutt appears to lament a rupture in white lineage. Carteret, who has lost his "ancestral home" following the Civil War and Federal Reconstruction, bemoans the fact that the war interrupted not only his attachment to his family's land but to the economic security that his inheritance should have provided him.[7] Even having avoided being "hopelessly impoverished" thanks to an auspicious marriage and the subsequent income from his wife Olivia's investments, Carteret's ambition to return his family to its previous aristocratic economic and social status remains thwarted.[8] Though the "happy" marriage returns Carteret to upper social classes and to the plantation his family had lost in Wellington in the war, the land alone does not secure the future Carteret feels owed (6). In fact, when Chesnutt describes Carteret's lingering "disappointment" in a marriage "marred" by being childless, he emphasizes the centrality and importance of the child in securing a lineage broken by war, Reconstruction, and the tentative rise of civic and social equity that followed (6). For Carteret, the return to a patrician social class depends on more than the repurchase of his family home: it depends on his ability to "perpetuate the name of which he was so proud," reasserting that name and its attendant values in a radically different postbellum order (6).

The differences of the postbellum order rankle Carteret, and though Chesnutt delays attaching overt racism to Carteret's wish to reassert his family's patrimony, animus against the halting attempt to reshape Southern society emerges as motivating factor. Indeed, from the first,

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[7] During the earliest stages of Reconstruction, a major political problem was the forfeiture of property during the Civil War, which is in part referenced here in Carteret's loss. Eric Foner's *Reconstruction* provides an essential overview of the questions of labor, political power, and land use that are at question here. The discussion of labor and land use in *Reconstruction* are particularly useful as a foregrounding for the animus that motivates Carteret at this juncture. Eric Foner *Reconstruction: Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), esp. 50-60.

[8] Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2012), 5. All further citations parenthetically in main text.

Chesnutt emphasizes small ways in which the social order has dramatically changed since the antebellum years. The very method of Carteret's return to social status, in fact, upends the patriarchal order of the south: by locating Carteret's return to his plantation ownership and social standing through his wife's inheritance, Chesnutt juxtaposes the systems of power that vastly privilege men with a feeling of powerlessness due to male disinheritance. Especially since Olivia's family supported what Carteret calls "abolition claptrap," Chesnutt paints Carteret's wish to return to the South's antebellum gendered and political order as a nostalgic fantasy that is doubly threatened by the inability to generate offspring with his wife (156). However, Carteret finds his "dead hope" to be "revived" when Olivia at last bears a child, coupling the advent of that child with Carteret's hopes not only for his genetic futurity, but for the style of Southern life he believed to be on the verge of extinction (6). The revival of Carteret's hope places his child at the center of his program to breathe new life in dormant structures of property, genetic inheritance, and political power, in a resurgence of the white supremacist order that had been partially curtailed during Federal Reconstruction. In this context, Chesnutt uses the Carteret's child to enact a discursive field of power that cuts across race and sex to structurally reinforce the hegemony of white heterosexuality through reproductive futurity. The drama of the novel, though shaped by these powerful institutions, is not merely to illustrate the operations of property and patrimony, however, but to show their injustice and motivate their decentering. As Chesnutt's novel eventually concludes, the displacement of the white child from the fields of power opens the possibility of new, and queer, arrangements to replace white normativity's position as *the* representation of good citizenship.

Marrow's argument begins with a sustained attack of the exclusive nature of reproductive futurity as a white and heterosexual formation. Once Carteret's long-awaited child is born, the

black family nurse, Mammy Jane, observes that his fate will be different from any "black, or yellow, or poor-white" baby on account of being "a child of such high quality" (11). Observing the intersecting role of class and race in determining the child's fate, Jane also realizes that the outcomes privileging white patrimony over other races or classes emerge from the privileges in the law itself: she professes that the Carteret's child would escape the fate enabled by "certain laws" of "juridical strangulation" for people of color and lower-class youth (11). Through Mammy Jane, Chesnutt illuminates how Carteret's reproductive security depends on intersecting social and legal regimes that, in spite of the assurances for equality provided by the Reconstruction amendments, privilege white kinship, white property, and white rights. When Chesnutt couples Carteret's reproductive future to the financial security of Olivia's inheritance, he opens his novel with a broadside attacking the structural inequalities that separate black futurity from white security. Moreover, he illustrates multiple dimensions of the whiteness of property that, as Cheryl Harris describes, structurally privilege whiteness to the social, legal, and financial detriment of black people.[9]

Chesnutt's agenda is not merely to make these structures visible: it is also to tease out the ways in which those structures were re-inscribed in the prevailing social consensus through the affective ties on which fiction especially relies. Alongside the combined references to the Carteret's lost familial plantation and nearly denied reproductive future, as well as Jane's diagnoses of the Carteret child's prospects, Chesnutt evokes violent and longstanding tropes

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[9] Cheryl Harris's "Whiteness as Property" breaks down the ways in which whiteness acts across the legal and social realms to consolidate economic power and privilege around racial divisions. She writes: "Through this entangled relationship between race and property, historical forms of domination have evolved to reproduce subordination in the present. . . whiteness and property share a common premise - a conceptual nucleus - of a right to exclude. This conceptual nucleus has proven to be a powerful center around which whiteness as property has taken shape." See Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707–91, 1714.

prevalent in the late nineteenth-century novel that returned with renewed vigor after the Civil War's conclusion. These tropes relished in the fantasy of Southern aristocratic life, celebrated racial segregation, and attached Southern futurity to continuity of lineages which had been torn apart not only by Civil War but through Radical Reconstruction.[10] Chesnutt's critiques of these networks of power are subtle: rather than launching a direct critique of these networks of power, Chesnutt's opening gambit deploys the child in order to appeal to the putative values of a bourgeois white readership in the North and South alike. In the process, he forces those readers to contend with the ways in which the fantasy of property and kinship structurally retrench white privilege; more powerfully, he forces the same readers to recognize their own role in that structural retrenchment.[11]

The conditions that Chesnutt discusses were hyper-visible, contentious, and contested when Chesnutt composed his book, amplifying the moral imperative of his novel to diagnose the relation between sentimental feelings and the structures of power in kinship and property. As a way of dramatizing the complex of social relations that intersect around the child, Chesnutt uses the drama of the Carteret and Miller families to address a very recent social rupture: the Wilmington Insurrection of 1898. The historic insurrection in Wilmington, North Carolina

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[10] Steven Belluscio discusses the relation of genre to passing narratives, which he suggests challenged the fantasy of a strict divide between the white and black literary imagination.
As Steven notes, "realist writers [ran] the risk of being profoundly unrealistic, even though investing characters with moral agency" when imagining the transgression of the racial divide (47). As I will discuss later, melodramatic representation became a way of transcending the racial divide that realism in some senses helped to enforce. Steven J. Belluscio *To Be Suddenly White: Literary Realism and Racial Passing*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), esp. 45-54.

[11] For example, Bryan Wagner argues "that the African American middle class, in other words, provokes an epistemological crisis that is simultaneously a crisis of white identity." I extend the discussion by observing not merely *that* Chesnutt argues against the totality of whiteness as an identity, but that he stages the child, in particular, as an avenue by which to dismantle whiteness. Bryan Wagner, "Charles Chesnutt and the Epistemology of Racial Violence." *American Literature* 73:2 (June 2001): 311–37, 312.

occurred when the white populace took arms against the "Fusionist" government, a political party composed of black and white elected officials, and deposed them. The *coup d'etat* resulted in a day of violence, destroying black businesses and homes, and resulting in between the murder of between sixty and three hundred black people, terrorizing the majority black population and destroying its wealth.[12] Afterwards, the insurrection was widely portrayed as a black race riot, an image that Chesnutt both sought to correct and to understand. In this effort, Chesnutt's aesthetic project in *Marrow* pertains to unaddressed social problems surrounding resurgent racism as well as the curtailing of recently won civil rights protections. By fictionalizing the 1898 insurrection, Chesnutt illustrated the near total breakdown in U.S. racial equality. His choice of topic was not only a matter of correcting the public record but of exposing the unexamined affective attachments to white security that rhetorically erased the black experience of the insurrection's explosive violence.[13] More than just the narrative around the insurrection itself, Chesnutt issues a challenge to prevailing discourses of bourgeois, middle-class life through which realist fiction imagined modern life. He illustrates the need to think—however provisionally—beyond the literary modes that to date implied progress, growth, and development, and to consider the audience for whom those narratives operated, and who they operated against.

In this light, Chesnutt's target is not the Carteret's or their child, but rather the broader network of associations that the child evokes. By re-centering his fictionalization of the

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[12] For more on the Chesnutt's approach to the Wilmington insurrection, see Joyce Pettis, "The Literary Imagination and the Historic Event: Charles Chesnutt's Use of History in *The Marrow of Tradition*, *South Atlantic Review* 55 no.4 (November 1990): 37-48; and Jae H. Roe "Keeping an 'Old Wound' Alive: *The Marrow of Tradition* and the Legacy of Wilmington" *African American Review* 33 no.2 (1999): 237-42.

[13] See Richard Yarborough, "Violence, Manhood, and Black Heroism: The Wilmington Riot in Two Turn-of-the-Century African American Novels." In *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*, edited by David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 225–52.

insurrection around more familiar literary discussions of family, Chesnutt is able to attack the broader, unexamined social inequality that lead to the riot itself, including sex and marriage as well as the economics and legal standing of property that institutionalize multi-generational racial inequality. By focusing on the racially exclusive reproductive futurity evoked by the child, Chesnutt shows how these systems of property, sex, and contract intersect. In the process, he presents a radical critique of U.S. structures of inequality that centers on the heteronormative standards through which intergenerational inequality proliferates—standards that privileged white reproductive futurity, property transfer, and kinship. As a formal gambit, the Carteret's child raises these varying problems by acting as an anchor for the novel's plot and politics: he is the source of the novel's first racial conflict, when his illness prompts Carteret to seek assistance from regional doctors but declines the services of Dr. Miller, the town's black, Harvard-educated doctor; he is at the center of the novel's resolution, when, after the white insurrection that seizes the town, Carteret appeals to Dr. Miller to save his ailing child. The dichotomy between the novel's attention to the illnesses of the Carteret's child and the novel's passing depiction of the death of the Miller's child at the novel's conclusion illustrates the racial bias behind the appeal that Chesnutt makes to white bourgeois readers.[14] Through those unequal futures, the child helps to illuminate the U.S. legal regimes that predicated the right to property, marital security, and

[14] See P. Jay Delmar's "Character and Structure in Charles W. Chesnutt's 'The Marrow of Tradition' (1901)" for a discussion of Chesnutt's plot structures. Delmar's discussion is useful for understanding the staging of Chesnutt's plot, though he does not claim, as I do, that the plot tends to hinge for dramatic effect on the rise to visibility and disability of Doddie Carteret. Delmar "Character and Structure in Charles W. Chesnutt's '*The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)." *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 13, no. 2 (Autumn 1980): 284-289.

sexual activity on whiteness, making these putative rights both tenuous and dangerous for black citizens and subjects.[15]

The child's symbolic relation to forms of structural racism that are Chesnutt's diagnostic target stems relate to the future promised by and to the white child. By placing the child at the tangled center of a series of social, legal, and sexual representations of social and civic life, Chesnutt helps to illuminate what Raymond Williams calls the "structure[s] of feeling" that organize social and civic life. Williams defines these affective structures as "social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available."[16] Williams' metaphor of saturation distinguishes between evident social formations (those that have been precipitated) and the subtextual formations that he describes as being "in solution" and thus, to a degree, not visible. Such a definition emphasizes power structures that are concealed: the child, in the context of *Marrow*, reveals the way unexamined, everyday experiences conceal U.S. racism's ubiquity. The feelings of attachment evoked by the symbolic child allow Chesnutt to explore how state-legitimated sexual contact and the contracts of the heterosexual family structure the life of the child and limit the futures available to that child or to that child's parents. Affective attachments to the child, as Chesnutt deploys them, index the realities of political life that structure black and white life in ways that obliquely reference the complex and enduring legal and social structures

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[15] When I refer to sex here, I refer to the way Judith Butler defines sex as "a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices." As such, I view sex as a network of expressions of control that also involve the literal regulatory bodies of government, as well as more expressive forms of social control. In short, sex, especially in the U.S. context, is deeply racialized. Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge, (1993), xii.

[16] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 132.

that protect whiteness and police blackness.[17] As a representation to which readers can attach affectively, the child thus acts as a conduit toward the very real political and legal questions that subtend Chesnutt's arguments.

In this way, the child is a mode by which Chesnutt discusses the realities of black life "juxtapolitically": he approaches the facts of the U.S. racist regime through the figure of the child presumed innocent or unaware of those regimes.[18] Chesnutt's approach allows him to write within a realist mode that also indexes deeper structural problems in realism's generally bourgeois approach to representing modern life: through the figure of the child, he evokes the social and legal structures that most literary realism avoids in its general failure to document black life. The strategic shift in focus questions realism's general dependence on forms of heteronormative social membership to appeal to white, bourgeois audiences. Addressing Chesnutt's challenge to realist fiction, Ryan Simmons shows that Chesnutt's realism functions by "reformulating realities" and by showing that "both 'race' and 'realism' as concepts are fictive"—they are constructs whose rhetorical and symbolic deployment can be critiqued.[19] To this point, as Chesnutt's novel advances, it also documents the limits of realism as a mode to address experience outside of normative American life. Recognizing the limits of realism as a mode for depicting structural inequality, Chesnutt's novel breaks into melodrama by the novel's

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[17] The affective attachments evoked by the child allow Chesnutt to critique the south's structural racism obliquely. This follows what Ryan Simmons indicates is Chesnutt's strategy of producing Southern life in part by reproducing various voices that white readers would not easily dismiss. See Ryan Simmons, *Chesnutt and Realism: A Study of the Novels*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006) 5-6.

[18] Lauren Berlant defines the juxtapolitical as a representation that "thrives in *proximity* to the political, occasionally crossing over in political alliance." In this proximity, the mere act of "see[ing] the expression of emotional response and conceptual recalibration as achievement enough," putting a break on the necessity of active political engagement. See Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), x.

[19] Ryan Simmons, *Chesnutt and Realism: A Study of the Novels*, 20.

end in order to show the limits of the progressive future towards which realism, in general, is oriented. Instead, Chesnutt uses the symbolic child to emphasize the very real problems of the present that inhibit and foreclose any viable prospect of social change by treating the structures of inequality or their literary representations as separate phenomena.

The ultimate challenge of the novel lies here: in balancing the damage and loss necessary to jolt a complacent readership with the need to gesture towards a provisional horizon of social adaptation. The task means experiencing damage more than representing transcendent futurity—but experiencing damage for particular audiences. By revealing that realism itself is predicated on whiteness because of its investments in kinship lineage and contract, Chesnutt implicates his white readership's participation in racial inequality by virtue of appealing to their affective attachment to the reproductive future secured by the white child. As such, Chesnutt stages an elaborate strategy to scrutinize the privileges of white subjectivity and the collective damage those privileges effect on black lives.[20] By showing the cruelty inherent in progressive political ideology as a structural problem in the realist novel, Chesnutt effectively charges U.S. realism with bolstering the hegemony of whiteness in the familial, economic, and reproductive realms. In

[20] Sarah Mesle, among others, argues that Southern sentimentalism provides a "complex illustration of the ways region and ideology interacted in a crucial and vexed moment in U.S. literary nationalism." (207). Elsewhere it is widely understood that Southern fiction played a crucial role in upholding the racist that privileged white audiences and white southern fantasies, including Nelson's *Red Rock* and *The Clansman*. Famously, *Century Magazine* in the 1880s circulated apologist fiction for the South in ways that made the failings and limits of Reconstruction visible. Sarah Mesle, "Sentimentalism's Nation: Maria J. McIntosh and the Antebellum Contexts of 'Southern' Fiction," *Studies in American Fiction* 40, no. 2 (2013): 203–30, 207. Also see Scott, Arthur L. "The Century Magazine Edits Huckleberry Finn, 1884 - 1885." *American Literature* 27, no. 3 (November 1955): 356–62. For additional readings of national contingency and the role of the literary, see also Robert S. Levine, *Dislocating Race and Nation: Episodes in Nineteenth-Century Literary Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). Jennifer Rae Greeson's *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

so doing, Chesnutt attacks the form of affective attachment that stabilizes national progress and futurity—the white child—to force a contention with the inequalities of the present.

In what follows, I discuss the political concerns that Chesnutt raises through affective ties to the future symbolically evoked by the child. First, I illuminate the way in which the reproductive futures available to black and white children, as represented by the Miller and Carteret family, implicate larger social and legal structures, especially the laws defending kinship and property. Second, I discuss how the child raises black sexuality as a mode of social control more broadly. In so doing, the role of anti-miscegenation animus in justifying black exclusion (as we find in the case of the presumed illegitimate birth of Dr. Miller's wife, Janet). Third, I explore how Chesnutt's novel addresses the relation of sexuality and segregation by referencing under-examined subtexts in *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court case that established the separate-but-equal paradigm. Finally, I unpack how the novel's conclusion offers queer relations as an antidote to racialized violence. I show how the novel ends by implying a queer intimacy between Miller and Carteret through which the novel offers a provisional sense of reparative justice. The invocation of queerness coincides with Chesnutt's abandonment of realism and break into the melodramatic mode. As I conclude, I suggest that queer structures of feeling replace the heteronormative and white arrangements that had precipitated the novel's violent crises. Minimizing the child as a symbol of the future by the novel's conclusion, Chesnutt opens up a pathway to the future not predicated on white heterosexuality. By decentering the child and the implied futurity of heterosexuality more generally, Chesnutt offers the potential for a transformative future that might be realized by and through the crises of the present.

1. Reproduction's Unequal Futures

By initially focalizing the novel from the point of view of the white inheritor, Major Carteret, Chesnutt privileges a regressive patriarchal viewpoint from the start. From the first pages, Chesnutt couples Carteret's racist fantasia for white supremacy with his child: Carteret, fearing that "his old name should be lost to the state" finds himself subject to "a new passion, stirring up dormant hopes and kindling new desires," that prompt him to pursue a "new trend in his thoughts . . . bearing on the future of his son" (20-21). Wishing to "enable his son, upon reaching manhood, to take place in the world commensurate with the dignity of his ancestors" who "had owned an estate of ninety thousand acres of land and six thousand slaves," Carteret drafts his plan for securing his son's future through the reinstitution of Carteret's antebellum position (21). Chesnutt makes clear that the futurity suggested by the child signifies in multiple ways: the child represents not only the temporality of heterosexual life and its investments in prosperity, property, and social status, but also the whiteness of a social and class imaginary that has systematically excluded black citizens. As we later discover, Doddie's arrival motivates Carteret to pursue a political movement for white supremacy with his fellow aristocrats that will eventually end in the novel's white insurrection. At his introduction, then, Doddie and the future promised to him direct the resurgence of white supremacy that culminates in the novel's most extreme violence.

Through the child and the fantasy of inheritance, Chesnutt's representational strategy seduces white readers into sympathy with Carteret's intentions despite his racism. By opening the novel with plan to secure a future for his child, Chesnutt repeats what, to many white bourgeois readers, must appear an anodyne argument: that it is reasonable to protect one's property and inheritance, even when both devolved from slavery. Chesnutt invites an affective

attachment to property and place with this logic, but then indicates how easily such logic slips into racism, segregation, and black oppression. The ease of the slippage emerges when, justifying political exclusion more generally, Carteret declares a commitment to his son's patrimony in part because of the "unfitness of the negro to participate in government" (22). Subsequently, when Carteret proclaims the importance of separation in government, he declares that "the white and black races could never attain social and political harmony by comingling their blood," indicating that to mix politically, in Carteret's mind, is associated with the fear and transgression of miscegenation (22). The slippage places the white child as a symbol for the imperative of separate government *and* the necessity of marital and reproductive segregation. Subtending Carteret's politics is a logic in which the child rhetorically evokes the idea of the body politic in ways that also implicate sex and sexual regulation—to protect patrimony is to protect the racial purity of the child.[21] As such, the privileges of the white child and the social, legal, and civic abjection of blackness performs what Judith Butler describes as desubjectification: the white child illustrates what it means to be at "the boundaries of bodily life where abject or delegitimated bodies fail to count as 'bodies,'" especially because black bodies only register as subjects of exclusion from the social order owed to the white child.[22] The

[21] Butler's discussion of the "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomenon that it regulates and constrains" is helpful for thinking of sex as a rhetorical regulatory regime. The formation is especially potent when applied to black subjects; in that any identification of subjects requires the "simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings." Further, Butler writes that certain "sexing practices" effect not only heterosexuality and its regulation, but also provides procedures through which "boundaries of racial distinction are secured as well as contested." I follow Butler here in the coupling of racial distinction to the transgressive boundaries of sexuality when she discusses how hegemonic formation of heterosexuality "works in the service of maintaining hegemonic forms of racial purity" which in only amplifies the "threat" of homosexuality (xxvi). Though race and sexuality are, as Butler emphasizes, clearly distinct, the functions of power contain similarities. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xi.

[22] Ibid., xxiv.

production of the white child, as a result, negates the claims of black people to full representation in government and the realization of equal rights as sexual and social subjects.

The reach towards the future that the child implies activates a network of political effects in terms of marriage, property law, and the right to participate in government. The whiteness of this child also activates a politics of white power that Chesnutt amplifies by offering Dr. Miller as Carteret's chiasmatic opposite. Miller exemplifies a completely different political futurity from that claimed by Carteret: where Carteret's family became impoverished after losing his family's plantation and slaves during the war, Dr. Miller embodies uplift narratives. Miller's father, whom Chesnutt describes a "thrifty colored man, the son of a slave," was ultimately able to transcend the legacy of slavery to provide his son a "professional education" in the "proud hope that his children or his grandchildren might be gentlemen in the town where their ancestors had once been slaves" (34). Fulfilling his father's wish, Dr. Miller had "promptly spent part of his inheritance in founding a hospital" in Wellington, even though "tempted to leave the south" for the "freer North, where race antagonism was less keen" (34). The Miller family's ambitions to "contribute" to the "uplift" of his races could not be more different from Carteret's racialized ambition, not only in the futures to which each aspire but the structures that enable their success. Carteret begins to meddle in the media and in government in order to enforce racial segregation and, in turn, to secure the property and patrician class status of his inheritance; conversely, Miller deploys his father's wealth for the general good, for the advancement of black citizens, who can contribute to a more equitable polity in turn.

At the level of plot, these oppositions and the differential futurities towards which Miller and Carteret reach come into direct conflict because of Doddie Carteret and, by contrast, the absence of affective attachment of any kind in the novel to Miller's son. With this imbalance,

Chesnutt expresses the inequality of white and black reproductive futurity in part by keeping the Miller's son invisible, and in part by dissociating reproduction from the Miller's vision of political futurity. In this way, Miller's belief that "the race antagonism which hampered his progress" was a "mere temporary thing . . . bound to disappear in time" suggests a generalized political ambition rather than specific attachment to the family (43). The non-genealogical view of a collective futurity imagines possible methods of structuring U.S. civil society that are not so closely related to historical structures from which contemporaneous race-regimes originated. Moreover, Miller evidences a pathway from slavery, to industry and capital accumulation, to professional prestige and charity that encourages a problematic optimism concerning the prospects of black uplift. Nonetheless, such a pathway to social predominance for Miller "in the town where their ancestors had once been slaves" stands as a stark rebuke to the fragility of Carteret's sense of worth and the manipulations, both social (in the form of newspaper antagonism) and governmental (in terms of his proposed disenfranchisement) that Carteret pursues in his program of racial segregation (34). Where Carteret desires to protect his privilege *for* his child, Miller attempts to benefit the broader social body, leaving his child to fall into the background. The contrast between the future secured for Carteret's child and the peripherality of Miller's son suggests the unequal relationship that white and black children retain to political progress and social change.

Where Miller generalizes about the possibilities of future equity, however, the novel's kinship ties emphasize the durability of historical formations of racial segregation and animus. The structural inequality by which Chesnutt presents reproductive futurity and its whiteness stretches back to the forms of kinship that couple white property to white futurity, and that leave black futurity comparatively unstable, as particularly evident in the kinship that connects the

Miller and Carteret families. Dr. Miller's wife, Janet, is acutely aware of the tenuousness of black reproductive futurity and the dangers of proximity to white structures of power, in part because of her shame over her family's origins in slavery. Herself the product of what was widely seen as an illegitimate marriage between Olivia's father, Mr. Merkel, and her mother, Julia Brown, a former slave, the stakes of kinship in securing family stability are clear to Janet. Julia, as the novel later reveals, was deprived of a legitimate marriage to her husband when Polly Ochiltree accused her of fabricating her husband's will, thereby removing Julia from the security of state-sanctioned marriage and its protections. Subsequently, Janet's experience with the unequal protections of the law rebuts Miller's more generalized faith racial progress. For Janet, slavery has powerful afterlives that have not yet begun to unravel.

In her case, the ties of family reproduction and kin are paramount because they can be used selectively and destructively. The different temporalities (suspense between future possibility and the cruelties of the past) are embodied in the difference between Janet and her shame and Miller's hopes for the future. When Miller is invited by his mentor to perform a surgery on Doddie without the Carteret's prior knowledge, Janet reacts to the "uplift" narrative suggested by her husband's invitation to Doddie's surgery with "anxiety" (44). Contrasting her husband's optimism about the future, she emphasizes its tenuousness and cruelty: she reminds her husband that he "must be very careful" and that when he thinks of "the poor child's mother," he should also "think of our own dear child and what it would mean to lose him," in a direct foreshadowing of the death that will close the novel (44). Though Janet reacts with worry to the dangers of her husband aiding a white family, those dangers are predicated on an affective appeal: even while acknowledging their tie to their own child, Janet does so in order to recognize the greater power wielded in Doddie's very existence by his parents' rhetoric and affective

attachments to futurity. The Carterets attach Doddie to the future that has been withheld from Janet: property, social position, and economic benefit, which do not accrue equally to either her or her son. The danger in helping Doddie, as Janet recognizes, is to bring the networked weight of these attachments to bear against Dr. Miller should his assistance in the operation fail. Janet's affective appeal to Olivia's fears of loss encodes the structural inequalities between black and white reproductive futurity in the fact that the future offered to Doddie is manifestly not available to the Miller's son. On the one hand, the legal investments in white patrimony that surround Carteret's invigorated investment in racial segregation, all in the name of his child's future, cannot be mobilized for the Miller's child. On the other hand, the two families approach the child in different ways: the Carterets view Doddie as a representation of their own political importance, an importance that depends on enforcing strict segregation. For the Millers, the child is an affective attachment completely bound to the possibilities of their own family to exist and circulate in public, one that is not necessary for securing legitimacy by tracing the longevity of the family line.

Chesnutt makes the sheer inequality the two children even more visible when, a few short chapters later, he brings the Miller family and the Carteret family into proximity once again. After Doddie has recovered, Olivia's cousin, Clara, who had been holding the child, nearly drops Doddie from a balcony. Immediately preceding the "spasmodic spring" that nearly results in Doddie's death, Olivia notices the arrival of "a lady and beside her a little boy, dressed in a child's sailor suit and a straw hat" who "with a wistful expression, was looking toward the party" (66). Olivia later observes "the other woman's look directed toward her and her child" and casts a "glance of cold aversion" in return (66). As it turns out, the innocent child Olivia notices is none other than the Millers' son; when Olivia recognizes her half-sister and nephew, the child's

innocence disappears into Oliva's hatred of her half-sister. On her side, Janet is "stung" by Olivia's look because it is the "nearest approach she had ever made to a recognition of her sister's existence" (67). These two gazes evoke a kind of violence between the sisters, which is staged in part through and around their sons. Janet reacts by striking her pony, at which point the "little boy" (her unnamed son) observes Doddie fall from Clara's arms (67). Subsequently Olivia has a "sudden thought" that some ill-forces might be at play (67). Chesnutt writes:

> Twice within a few weeks her child had been in serious danger, and upon each occasion a member of the Miller family had been involved, for she had heard of Dr. Miller's presumption in trying to force himself where he must have known he would be unwelcome. Janet was just turning her head away as the buggy moved slowly off. Olivia felt a violent wave of antipathy sweep over her towards her baseborn sister who had thus thrust herself beneath her yes. If she had not cast her brazen glance toward the window, she herself would not have turned away and lost sight of the child. (67)

The events of these passages comprise what must be mere seconds in time; yet they are rich with significance because the danger rests solely on the white son of the Carteret's and continues the erasure of the Millers' own child. Moreover, the presence of the Miller family—and perhaps, more importantly, the ignored and effaced son—are perceived by Olivia as a direct threat to Doddie. The erasure of the Miller son even emphasizes Doddie's presumed innocence while withholding innocence from the Miller's son, himself but a bystander. Instead, Olivia presumes black guilt automatically, and associates Janet's son with the danger she projects onto her half-sister. To once again to make the Miller family appear proximal to the Carteret's family crisis effectively emphasizes the Miller's family's own marginal position in relation to the novel's

plot: they are instrumental for understanding the Carteret family's crisis of reproductive futurity, rather than being granted a secure reproductive futurity in their own right.

In such scenes, Chesnutt foregrounds the unequal accrual of power and social sympathy to white and black children. This unequal investment implicates more than the regressive politics of Carteret's segregationist project. It also undermines the politics of uplift that Miller professes from the novel's outset. Though Miller explains that American society is "on the way toward [a] solution" to addressing structural racism, the novel shows such a belief to be an act of will (35). The unequal futures afforded to the novel's black and white children make the willfulness of Miller's optimism more evident: indeed, with the novel's persistent focus on the Carteret's child, Janet and Dr. Miller's own son is given little characterization, attention, and afforded no sympathy or subjectivity by the novel as a whole, which refocuses the narrative around the reproductive futurity and genealogies of white families exclusively. These unequal structures belie the optimism behind Miller's observation of "how inescapably the present is woven with the past, how certainly the future will be the outcome of the present" (70). The contrast between his child and Doddie illuminates a cruel optimism that inhibits a progressive future as a site of affective investment and possible social change. Conversely, his wife Janet reveals the dangers of the present *because* of the persistence of social, legal, and kinship structures that deprivilege black life.

Chesnutt's affective approach to political change is instructive: his novel is cruel in the sense that it requires loss, of the child especially, to draw together a polity fragmented by race. For Berlant, cruel optimism stems from the attachment to an "object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility" that actually "makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a

person or people is striving."[23] That optimism is what Chesnutt's wish to "do some good" in his fiction and what Dr. Miller's optimism runs up against. In Chesnutt's hands, the symbolic child shows the ways in which reproductive futurity depends on the unequal application of U.S. law to black and white families, marking reproductive futurity as a cruel optimism because of its implicitly racial structure.[24] His novel shows that realism's project is itself structured around an optimism that is made doubly cruel by its generic protection of whiteness as a stable form of state investment, even while the genre professes to work towards forms of social progress that transcend quotidian conflicts in the present.

Where Lee Edelman might say, the "future is kid stuff," Chesnutt emphatically observes that not all reproductive futures are equal because of the way in which the imaginary of lineage is predicated on an assumption of whiteness.[25] In parsing the imbrication of reproductive futurity with whiteness, Chesnutt shows that America's racist past is not so nearly divorced from the present as liberal progressivism and its adherents (including Miller) would profess. Instead, Chesnutt reminds readers of the difficulty of leaving behind the "dark story" of the past that, in

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[23] For Berlant, cruel optimism makes the conditions of the present clear by what she claims is the process of making the "historical present" visible by inhabiting moments of "impasse" or "crisis." She writes that inhabiting the present with a cognizance of its continuity with the past allows for "collective catching up to what is already happening in the ordinary world [as it is] shaped in a crisis-defined and continuing now." Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 2, 54.

[24] The dynamics of Chesnutt's abortive attempts to effect social change through the novel can be understood in a parallel way to Lauren Berlant's interest in the failed promise of the late-twentieth century "good life." The enticing impossibility of attachment to a transformational possibility are made visible through temporal tension between the aspired-for future, and the incompletely understood present. While there are clear historical differences between Berlant's description of our contemporary affective attachments, I think Chesnutt precedes the idea in that his novel shows the ways in which realism relied on an idea of progressive development—of a good life—that actually stood in the way of enacting political progress, much as Berlant's articulation describes.

[25] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 1. For a thorough critique of the way that Edelman's polemic fails to include and recognize the unique conditions faced by (queer) people of color, see Robert L. Caserio et al., "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (May 2006): 819–28.

Miller's mind, most African Americans "would rather forget" (70). That forgetting contributes to a collective peril, due to the durability of the racist past that persistently curbs and aborts the arrival of a future of radical, egalitarian change. The sense in Miller's reflection that present conditions can effect a particular future ultimately collapses, leaving his stated optimism trapped by the conditions of the present that interrupt any eschatology of full and equal citizenship as a social and civic realization. Chesnutt shows the danger of Miller's positivity by repeating the violence of the past and the erasure of black kinship and property. Instead, he illustrates the limits of progressive change through the cruelty of loss. Chesnutt carefully disallows Miller's optimistic belief in social progress, in this framing, based on the failure of the black child to destabilize white patrimony and power. As Chesnutt shows, the reproductive futurity that should be secured by the child is predicated on an optimism in which only a select few can invest, an optimism predicated on whiteness itself. With such optimism curtailed, the characters of Chesnutt's novel are forced to relive the effects of U.S. inequality in a present in which the failures of Reconstruction's push for racial equality and racial uplift come into painful relief.

2. Outside of Contracts: Miscegenation, Marriage, and the Law

As the rhetorical slippage between the child and the network of social customs and legal regulations separating black and white life indicates, the child is a potent symbol. By raising complex fears surrounding miscegenation, the child metaphorically represents a more concrete system of social control by obliquely raising the elaborate regimes by which Southern law criminalized black sexuality and prohibited interracial sexual relations. The future of the child and the racist systems differentiating black from white reproductive futurity are, as Chesnutt is well aware, the pernicious extension of the developing late-century regulatory apparatus that

targeted sex and sexuality. Where the affective attachment to the child is one of Chesnutt's strategies for unearthing systemic injustice and inequality, he also approaches reproduction's flipside: sex and sexual expression, and the unjust regulatory apparatus that deploys the prospects of black sexuality in order to breach contracts, curtail rights, and eject black citizens from the body politic. As Katherine Franke has shown, marriage law in the postbellum and post-Reconstruction South was developed into a tool by which to regulate and, more frequently than not, to prosecute the sexual expression of black people.[26] Thus, where the symbolic child and the contexts of that child's lineage signify regimes of social control that interweave governance, contractual rights (such as marriage), and social segregation, Chesnutt is also interested in moving beyond mere reference and into explicit exploration of the way sex is encoded in social and legal power.

The first obvious suggestion of sexual contact is through the novel's discussion of miscegenation and marriage, which largely revolves around a discourse of racial "purity and prestige" whose inverse logic is one of disgust at the prospect of interracial intimate contact (47). As such, sexual intimacy registers in the background of the novel in the same way that it registered in Chesnutt's cultural and historical moment: in the expansion of morality laws and regulations by which the nation described which sexual encounters were permissible. These laws targeted black people with precision, but they were not particular to the South—they fit into a larger pattern by which segregation and legal inequality intersected in the national imaginary and law alike. Often based on narratives of morality and social development that were advocated by white reformist Northerners alongside segregationist Southerners, marriage came to form a

[26] See Katherine Franke, *Wedlocked: The Perils of Marriage Equality* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

regime for policing sexual expression in part by limiting sexual contact to marriage, which itself became more intensely racially segregated as white Southern politicians sought to restrict postbellum interracial equality. The fallout from any perceived transgression was, as Chesnutt indicates, a broad threat: when he writes that "a Negro has been arrested on suspicion—and the entire race is condemned on general principal," he indicates the deep dangers that black individuals and communities faced in challenging or subverting unequal laws, including those surrounding interracial marriage (115).

Chesnutt attacks the inequality of sexual relations between black and white families with a particular intensity in the case of Janet Miller and her mother, Julia Brown, who was deprived of her husband's inheritance by Polly Ochiltree, nominally because of the social prohibitions on interracial marriage. Janet Miller's sense of family, of kinship, and of the responsibilities of sexual relations, stems from the tension between her own family and heritage. Since her family became forbidden in society and in the law after the passage of anti-miscegenation legislation, her feelings of family kinship are replaced instead with a pronounced sense of shame. Through the persistence of Janet Miller's shame, Chesnutt reveals that the promise of black reproductive futurity remains tenuous in part because of the intensive regimes designed to police and politicize black sexuality. Either within or outside of marriage, white people made black sexual contact a threat to be regulated and curtailed through either the law or violence.

Janet's case shows that the legal protections through which her own claims to kinship and to the legitimacies of the contracts that secure her family's social place are tenuous at best in part because of the pathologization of black sexuality, itself a legal and rhetorical legacy of slavery. Possessing a sexuality, Janet shows, means unearthing the specters of the past that inflect present life in spite of the law. As a result, Janet's presumed illegitimacy casts a long shadow over her

life. From the beginning, Chesnutt indicates that Janet, who "conceals nothing else from her husband," feels her family's attachment to slavery to be a "lifelong sorrow" – a sorrow intensified by the fact that Janet was denied an inheritance from her father on account of social prohibitions on interracial marriages (44). Magnifying Janet's abjection is the fact that race divides her from her "white sister, her sole living relative" (43). Janet's social ostracism and her separation from her genetic kin cause her to feel "ashamed of her mother's race" because it is "a part of the taint of slavery," leaving her affective attachment to the past enshrouded in an enduring shame that contradicts her husband's optimism (43). Chesnutt's focus on Janet's heritage reveals the totality with which black sexuality negates the rights of citizenship and the legitimacy of contract. The depiction of her enduring sorrow elevates the affective appeal of the reproductive child into an unabashedly political register because of the fundamental way in which the symbolic child as a figure of futurity excludes blackness.

Chesnutt's explicitly political content emerges because Janet's family history and the anti-black rhetoric that surrounds her overrides the letter of the law itself. As the novel eventually reveals, Janet's shame is least legally unwarranted. As it turns out, Janet has been illegally deprived of her legitimate inheritance: Olivia eventually discovers that Janet was wrongly excluded from her father's will. As Olivia learns, Polly Ochiltree threatened Janet's mother, Julia Brown, with legal recourse in order to suppress her marriage to Samuel Merkell, Olivia's father. Aghast that Julia could lay claim to a family inheritance "because she had been my father's slave," Mrs. Ochiltree challenges Julia to accuse her in public. Ochiltree proclaims that "my word is worth yours a hundred times over, for I am a lady, and you are—what?" (85). As Olivia discovers, rather than deploying the law to invalidate Julia's claim to a legitimate marriage, Ochiltree had used the specter of race and Ochiltree's social position to permanently

cast Julia and her family from any possibility of joining the town's civic body. But rather than acting through the law to negate Julia's legal claim to her marriage and her husband's will, Ochiltree rhetorically erases Julia, emphasizing her own role status as a "lady" in contrast to Julia's status as a blank "what." The extrajuridical pressure that Ochiltree employs indexes the power of the white enunciation to erase black bodies and to adjudicate black rights with the threat, if not the explicit practice, of the law. Ochiltree's enunciation's secondary power lies in the way she delegitimizes Julia's sexuality itself by removing it from the protections of the law entirely. By referring to Julia as a blank "what," Ochiltree attacks her marriage, property, and legal status by suggesting a fundamental immorality in her sexual activity that cannot be reclaimed.

When Olivia later discovers through her husband that if Julia and her father's marriage had been performed "during the military occupation" then "the marriage would have been legally valid, though morally and socially outrageous," Chesnutt critiques the irrationality of racial segregation in marriage and kinship, and against white deployment of the law to enshrine racial inequality (159). But Chesnutt's full-throttle attack of legal inequality's irrational basis goes further than the tangential address in the law itself—it raises the rhetorical structures of legal bias that depend on panic of interracial sexual contact to the main text of the law, where it was more often mentioned passingly and was often upheld on the precedent of custom. It is that social dimension that is of particular interest to Chesnutt because of its incoherent logic. By unpacking the legal claim Janet has to a legitimate parentage, Chesnutt's representation cuts to the sanctity of marriage upon which Olivia situates her sense of her own justice and her rejection of Janet, showing that logic to be a social fraud that illegitimately structures the life of a woman otherwise entitled to property, inheritance, and social standing. Olivia had thought such marriages to be

prohibited under anti-miscegenation laws: she believed that any interracial marriage could only be "an empty formality" since "the marriage of white and colored persons were forbidden by law" (155). After Polly Ochiltree's death, Olivia finds a series of documents that upend her understanding of her own inheritance and also her hatred of Janet Miller. As it turns out, her father's last will and testament, a document that Olivia finds "full of equal rights an all the abolition claptrap," legitimated his marriage to Julia Brown and devolved his inheritance to their "lawful child" (157). By tracing the erasures of the law and the extralegal preference granted to segregation's social traditions, Chesnutt mines the ways in which the novel's white characters invoke extralegal justifications such as Olivia's "higher laws" in order to disregard the equal protections, such as they were, of the laws at hand. With each invocation of "higher laws," Chesnutt gestures to a powerful rhetorical field in which black subjects are caught before the law can intercede on their behalf.

The revelation of Julia's marital legitimacy turn's Olivia's moralizing ironically on its head. Chesnutt writes that for Olivia "marriage was a serious thing—to a right thinking woman the most serious concern of life" in that something like a marriage certificate was "evidence of her wifehood, the seal of her child's legitimacy, her patent of nobility—the token of her own and her child claim to social place and consideration" (158). Though she observes that "the legality of marriage had never been questioned" even during the Civil War, Olivia nonetheless destroys the marriage certificate that legitimates her sister's kinship and her inheritance. Olivia balks at her own action, however. Even with her father's marriage certificate and will destroyed, "its ghost still haunted her" despite her belief in a "higher law, which imperiously demanded that the purity and prestige of the white race" (158, 155). When Olivia finds her father's marriage was legitimate, Olivia reacts with fear because of the "new era" for Janet's "mother's race" that

Janet's "lawful" claim to kin and property inaugurates (157). In these discoveries, Chesnutt does more than reveal the ways in which prejudice structured the deployment of the law and its protections. He shows the radical extent to which fear of sexual contact and the protections of racial "purity and prestige" overwrite that which is legal in the first place (47). By exploring the shame of Janet's attachment to her own past, which stems as much from the presumed illegitimacy of her mother and father's sexual contact as much as from her family's history in slavery, Chesnutt details the ways in which sexual legitimacy was mobilized in order to dismantle the equal protections afforded to black people. By documenting the delegitimizing of Julia's sexual contact and marital contract, Chesnutt painfully inhabits the cruel optimism that structures reproductive futurity for black families, a promise that was offered only to be withheld.

3. Sex, Deviance, and Segregation Law

The legal history by which Olivia inherited her wealth and by which Janet was disinherited is not an idle fiction in Chesnutt's hands, but rather central to understanding the lived experience of social and legal inequality. In fact, his fictional exploration of the legal networks of sex and marriage evokes the intransigent and material realities that impeded substantive social change. In this regard, *The Marrow of Tradition* represents a pessimistic break from Chesnutt's public professions about literature's sociological ability to modify public opinion. To be sure, for Chesnutt the "popular form" of the novel has an "ethical purpose" to illuminate inequality.[27] But his approach differs from the realism of Howells' bourgeois families by indexing the reality of U.S. legal and social racism that was unfolding in their contemporary

[27] Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2012), 204.

moment. When Chesnutt declares that he alludes to "miscegenation, lynching, disenfranchisement, separate cars, and the struggle for professional and social progress in an unfriendly environment," he describes the facts of black life in the United States that do not find popular literary representation.[28] For Chesnutt, this is the uncontestable basis of U.S. civic and social life that sit in his novel's as an ever-present backdrop. Chesnutt's appeal to the facts of U.S. racism, inevitably, had its limitations: despite praising the artistry of Chesnutt's novel, William Dean Howells declared the novel to be "bitter" in its analysis of race relations.[29] The disappointing performance of his novel on the literary marketplace seemed to prove Howells's negative view. Subsequently, Chesnutt determined that the public "as a rule does not care for books in which the principal characters are colored people."[30] The novel's disappointing reception only further illustrates the object of Chesnutt's critique: that any attempt to unravel the centuries of structural oppression weaved through every dimension of public life will require a comprehensive contention with their operations across multiple, intersecting dimensions of legal, social, and civic life.

From that vantage, Chesnutt's ambition to diagnose these legal structures and histories of oppression through fiction serves a significant function despite his failures on the popular marketplace. As Chesnutt ultimately demonstrates, the attention to romantic structures, kinship, and legitimate sexual contact that only the novel can provide also illuminates oblique contexts in the legal approach to segregation. Chesnutt selected an immediate target for this novel's

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[28] Ibid., 204.

[29] Qtd. in Sydney Bufkin, "Beyond 'Bitter': Chesnutt's The Marrow of Tradition," *American Literary Realism* 46, no. 3 (2014): 230–50, 241.

[30] Charles Chesnutt, Letters quoted in *The Marrow of Tradition: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2012), 204.

approach: *Plessy v. Ferguson*. As Chesnutt's fiction brings to the fore, one of the most infamous legal decisions of his time deployed logics and subtexts of sexual contact to inaugurate a shockingly aggressive legal regime for abridging the recently-won equal rights protections of the Fourteenth Amendment. While it is well known that *Marrow* works from and addresses the context of separate-but-equal as a legal framework, the intersection of his novel with the logic of sexual segregation is less well explored.[31] Though the case on its face appears to pertain to public accommodations, its logic rests as well on the regulation of and segregation of rights on the basis of sex—issues that are central to Chesnutt's approach to representing the narratives that contribute to social and legal inequality.

The case, in which Homer Plessy, an African American man, was expelled from a "whites only" car on the East Louisiana Railway despite having purchased a first-class ticket in that section, legalized what we would now call second-class citizenship through the doctrine of separate but equal. Writing for the majority, Justice Henry Billings Brown distinguishes between social and political rights to justify segregation: though acknowledging that the Fourteenth Amendment was "undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law," he suggested that forced social equality was beyond its scope in ways that ultimately extended from the social legitimacy of regulating sex and marriage.[32] When writing that it "could not have been intended . . . to enforce social, as distinguished from political, equality" Brown suggested

[31] For a discussion of Chesnutt's approach to Plessy, see Brook Thomas, "The Legal Argument of Charles W. Chesnutt's Novels" *REAL: The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 18 (2002): 311-34.

[32] For the majority, Justice Henry Billings Brown wrote: "The object of the amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but, in the nature of things, it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political, equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either." *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896), "Plessy v. Ferguson," Legal Information Institute: Cornell School of Law. Accessed April 4, 2018. https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/163/537.

that social life was not bound by equal political rights. He illustrated the way social life enforces "natural" separations: differences in sex and restricted access to marriage—thereby setting a precedent by which the movement of black citizens into the realm of national subjects depended on social investments to anchor and to theorize the legitimacy of second-class citizenship status.

Corroborating his claim, Brown cited precedent permitting the separation of the sexes in schools and limits on marriage through anti-miscegenation laws. Drawing from decisions by the presumably liberal State Court in Massachusetts, Brown observes that segregation is justifiable: according to the court, when the "great principle [of equality] comes to be applied to the actual and various conditions of persons in society," it does not assert that "men and women are legally clothed with the same civil and political powers."[33] In a gesture to the right of states to exact such regulation more broadly, he observes that "intermarriage of the two races may be said in a technical sense to interfere with the freedom of contract, and yet have been universally recognized as within the police power of the state."[34] In Brown's logic, interaction between the sexes and sexual contact between black and white Americans alike constitutes a legitimate state interest worthy of regulation. The abridgments of equal rights provisions, then, emerge an inherent part of government's ability to regulate social spheres outside of the Federal provisions for equality under the law.

As is evidenced by the inequality that Janet and Julia experience compared to the Carteret family, discourses surrounding miscegenation provide a barometer for the ways that regimes

[33] Plessy also suggests that rights even if "settled and regulated by law, are equally entitled to the paternal consideration and protection of the law for their maintenance and security." In order to uphold the separation between political and social equality, Brown determined that the Fourteenth Amendment cannot abjure fundamental distinctions in race, sex, age, or disability, all factors that the *Plessy* decision identified as areas worthy of public regulation. Ibid., Accessed April 4, 2018.

[34] Ibid., Accessed April 4, 2018.

policing race and sexuality devolved from historic models to provide precedent for restricting citizenship rights. In the reflections of Olivia, the issue at hand is the difference between the legally defensible and the "morally and socially outrageous" fact of interracial intimacy, which ultimately motivates her to destroy Julia Brown's marriage contract (159). Such events illustrate how the sexual segregation behind *Plessy*'s claim that social and political segregation scale outwards to justify extralegal action on behalf of white people: for Olivia, for example, the idea of sharing a heritage with Janet is a social transgression even if legally permissible. But that inequality exists in part because of the way the law then demotes Janet as a sexual subject because of her presumably illegitimate heritage. Those structures have long histories and afterlives that Chesnutt shows are easy to invoke but difficult to bury.

The focus on regulating sexual contact and gendered expression becomes a primary mode of social policing from which the post-*Plessy* law eschews the invocation of equal protections. But the use of sex regulation to justify segregation has a more pernicious side effect. In his discussion of the interlocking relationship between segregation and logics of sexual surveillance, Roderick Ferguson indicates that racial segregation depends on the "task of protecting race and gender norms" in ways that intertwine legal interventions in race and legal interventions in sex and sexuality—with the effect of creating extrajuridical spaces for the discernment and punishment of black sexual expression.[35] Indeed, when Brown justifies the "paternal" abridgement of civil rights, he does so in defense of white standards of social and sexual conduct as a legitimate interest of the state in preserving social mores that subordinates all other forms under the paternalistic order.[36] But the evocation of miscegenation and sex difference goes

[35] Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), viii.

[36] See *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896), (accessed April 4, 2018).

farther in naturalizing not only white but heterosexual ideas about sex and gender contact.[37] These norms privileged the sexual mobility of white heterosexual men and the so-called sexual purity of white women, which often provided a pretext by which to exact penalties from sexual practices and racialized subjects outside of that set—in exactly the ways that permit Olivia to inherit property that by law belonged to Janet.[38] Thus, *Plessy* unexpectedly extends existing regimes for policing differences the basis of sex as well as permissible marital contracts as a pretext for its sweeping decision, indicating the way in which the legal logic of segregation leaned on a social investment in separating sexual contact between races. That logic is shot through the narrative's management of Olivia and Janet's difference, locating an irrational legal framework of segregation in the restriction of sexual contact. In other words, after *Plessy*, equal rights provisions are subordinated to policy interests derived from exclusionary social investments that the equal rights provision did not always transcend. It is the logic by which sexual segregation and the regulation of sexual contact differentiates political and social rights that Chesnutt himself addresses and shows to be one of the most dangerous areas of white supremacist violence. He shows the durable legal architecture by which white people curtailed the rights of people of color—but he does so through the affective attachments that the novel uniquely circulates in order to show the ways in which social rights and political rights are far more tightly intertwined than the law itself appeared to recognize.

[37] Where *Plessy*'s majority decision depended on a separation between Black and white social rights, Edlie Wong notes how the dissent utilized the irony that Chinese Americans, whose right to citizenship was at the time insecure following the Chinese Exclusion Act, retained a right that Black citizens were not afforded. See Edlie L. Wong, *Racial Reconstruction: Black Inclusion, Chinese Exclusion, and the Fictions of Citizenship*, America and the Long 19th Century (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 4.

[38] Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black,* viii.

The inequality of marriage that Ochiltree and Janet illustrate at the rhetorical level pales when compared to the most violent depictions in the public media about the threat of miscegenation and sexual expression. In fact, the distinction *Plessy* makes between social and political rights and their adjudication under the equal protection clause could spill over violently in ways that *Plessy* only obliquely acknowledges. Behind the justification of miscegenation laws was non-marital sex itself, particularly with the threat of black rape. The threat of rape in the South was the next and most effectively deployed extension of the specter of interracial marriages, themselves already seen by whites like Ochiltree and Olivia as being on the borders of legality. There is an extensive Southern rhetorical regime for twisting interracial contact between white women and black men into a rhetoric of sexual violence.[39] Moreover, that rhetorical slippage has a long history of being used to justify extralegal violence and retribution against the nation's black citizens, revoking the rights and protections of the law along the way and contravening any subtle distinction between social, political and civil spheres of rights protections. Sex, in this case, overrides citizenship and the law—and it is that capacity to override that Chesnutt explores in the way miscegenation and sexual violence itself conflated in the public eye to justify the active public revolt by white people against black citizens.

These functions are at the heart of the Wellington white insurrection and riot, when Carteret deploys the specter of interracial marriages and interracial sex in order to incite white animus against black citizens for the rights they retain despite the separation between political

[39] The trope was popularized in Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (1903), but also has echoes in Stowe's relations between Tom and Little Eva (See Williams *The Race Card*, 103-05). For a discussion of the way that the threat of sameness with the black male provoked an amplification of sexual differences, see Robyn Wiegman, "Black Bodies/American Commodities: Gender, Race, and the Bourgeois Ideal in Contemporary Film," in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, ed. Lester Friedman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 308–28. For a discussion of the rise of tropes of violence, see Joel Williamson *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), esp. 115-119; 121-24.

and social law that Justice Brown articulated. Upon discovering what Carteret labels as an "infamous!" anti-lynching argument in a black newspaper, Carteret appeals less to the argument against lynching than to the arguments for the legality of miscegenation. When the article critiques how lynching "might be expected to follow from miscegenation laws," its author observes the ways in which the law maintains racial division at the level of the sexual contact it allows between races (55). More importantly, the article notes the ways in which miscegenation laws cut to the heart of the individual liberty so recently won for black citizens. When writing that such laws "destroy the liberty of contract" in order to promote "a fanciful purity of race, to make crimes of marriages to which neither nature, nor religion nor the laws of other states interposed any insurmountable barrier," Chesnutt places constitutional egalitarianism against Carteret's tradition of "unwritten laws" (55). Moreover, he observes that the momentum of segregation overwrites egalitarian theories of natural equality—just as evidenced by *Plessy* in the seemingly anodyne address of public accommodations (55). This difference, Chesnutt writes, stands as an "indictment of the laws and social systems of the South," in a biting critique that cuts to the illogic of Southern racism and its manifestations (55).[40] This maintenance of sexual difference has two features: first, it operates with the aura of political disgust at the prospect of interracial sex; second, it martials a thesis of reproductive purity in order to justify the reach of the regulatory regime, a regime used to punish black sexual activity much more frequently than white.

These public fears are but politely represented in the legal discussion of segregation from which Chesnutt derives his critique. Behind the law stood a much more violent reality that it was

[40] By adjudicating these rights and the theories that underwrite them in two separate media environments—Carteret's prestigious paper vs. the underdog "Negro" publication—Chesnutt intensifies the stakes of their various modes of argumentation by noting how media markets participate in the dismissal of black equality.

Chesnutt's goal to illustrate. The proximity of sex to mechanisms of segregation appear most starkly with the attack white womanhood that is supposed with the murder of Polly Ochiltree and near-execution of the innocent black servant, Sandy, for the crime. In a sense, miscegenation alone does not provide enough of a terror to force white supremacy into action—the subtext behind miscegenation must, instead, be made visible. It is the prospect of rape that intercedes in the novel when the "campaign for white supremacy was flagging": when the black servant Sandy is accused of raping Polly Ochiltree, who was in fact killed by her nephew, Tom Delamere, Carteret's program finds the rallying cry that it had lacked (106). After the murder, Chesnutt writes that "suspicion was at once directed to the negroes" and that subsequently Sandy is arrested for "having assaulted and murdered a white woman," invoking the threat of sexual violence as the subtext for "assault" (110). Sandy's presumed actions are taken to indicate the "reversion" to "ancestral instincts" of the town's black citizens; subsequently, the whites of the town circulate the fear that "the whole white womanhood of the South was in danger" (110). When describing the dangerous threat of the "black brute," Chesnutt offers the snide aside that "all black brutes it seems are burly," in a direct acknowledgment of the rhetorical fields of power that were deployed to circumvent the law and justify mob violence (140). The events that contrast a rhetoric of black animality against white female fragility culminate in "the entire race" being "condemned on general principles," which stand as a fundamental revocation of Miller optimism that the "good citizenship" of Wellington's black residents will translate into equal treatment (115). More importantly, the language of sexual violence participates in a rhetorical turn that positions black subjects as unhuman explicitly in order to eject them from the town's civic body. The presumption of sexual violence indicates a logic ready made by the town's white citizens to justify the rejection of equal rights that the town's black citizens so recently earned.

The scene with Sandy shows that the specter of sex could be successfully mobilized to stir racial resentment into political upheaval and to obviate legal protections for protected classes of people. Subsequently, the insurrection with which the novel culminates emerge from the racial animus activated by Polly Ochiltree's murder. In the moments directly preceding the riots, Carteret rekindles the white anger at black sexuality that Sandy's acquittal had not satisfied. As Chesnutt writes, "the reproduction, in the *Morning Chronicle* of the article from the *Afro-American Banner*, with Carteret's inflammatory comment, took immediate effect" and caused the plot of the novel that had otherwise been paused to "move[] rapidly during the next few days" (148). For Carteret, since the black newspaper article itself was "an insult to white womanhood" akin to the danger of Ochiltree's death, requiring "active steps" to curtail the "equality of the negro and his right to discuss or criticize the conduct of the white people" (148). Carteret's yoking together of Sandy's wrongful accusation with black free speech shows how the criminalization of black sexuality constituted a regulatory regime to remove or restrict the rights of black citizens that had been inaugurated by the Fourteenth Amendment. Here, a social distinction explodes into the public and political realm, jettisoning whatever logic *Plessy* used to distinguish social and political rights. What Chesnutt observes is that as much as the affective ties of kin and family can draw out the structures of racial inequality, one must also discuss the fractures in the law that were used to police black lives, to curtail black rights, all for the sake of upholding the fragile hegemony of whiteness.

The role of sex and sexuality in providing a justification for abjuring civil rights stands in even starker contrast to the sexuality of the novel's most deviant white man, for whom the privileges of whiteness act as a shield. In contrast to the completely unjust violence against Sandy despite of his innocence, the novel provides a sleeper-representation of a different kind of

ironic deviance in sexual behavior to amplify the cruel irony of Sandy's near execution—that of the murderer and rake, Tom Delamere. Chesnutt approaches Delamere from the beginning with the suggestion of sexual otherness. Upon his first introduction, the novel describes him as "the handsomest man in Wellington" but turns that desirability against him (13). When later describing Delamere, Chesnutt bends his gender, attributing to him characteristics of deviance that subvert white masculinity and give that contradict the righteousness of Sandy that narratives of black male violence erase. Chesnutt writes that "no discriminating observer would have characterized his beauty as manly. It conveyed no impression of strength, but did possess a certain element, feline rather than feminine, which subtly negativated the idea of manliness" (13). As Mason Stokes argues, Chesnutt positions Delamere as a kind of inverse counterpoint to Sandy's morality not only in his drinking, gambling, and race-hatred, but also in his sexual deviance, which Stokes reads as his masturbatory deviance—someone whose aristocratic heritage enfeebles white bodies, neuters inheritance, and interrupts contributions to national growth.[41]

The presentation of Delamere as a sexual deviant undercuts the public narratives of black sexual violence with another narrative about white sexual threats. For Stokes, Chesnutt evokes the discourses of heterosexual pathology, in gender binary non-adherence and in the imagination of possibly pathological sexual behaviors like masturbation. But Chesnutt's objective is not just to repeat the violent discourses of deviance indiscriminately, but to observe their unequal application across races and the ways in which the privileges of whiteness and class override the threats of deviance. Sandy, after all, is nearly slaughtered by a white mob, while Delamere's sexual and monetary malfeasance goes largely sanctioned by society men because of his lineage.

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[41] Mason Boyd Stokes, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy*, New Americanists (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 121.

Through Chesnutt deploys language of deviance to help undercut Delamere, his actions here accrue less to the deviance itself than to the hypocrisy of white society's racist distribution of sexual threat to black and white citizens, for the singular purpose of ostracism and for the suspension of civil rights. For Chesnutt, Delamere's sexual deviance is bracketed: it stems from the degeneracy of white inheritance, more than from a sense of queer difference. Moreover, it stems from the very pathologies that protect heterosexuality and whiteness alike at the costs of all other modes of expression and all other protections for civil and social life. The unequal distributions of rights protections impact with an especially cruel irony due to the way the deployment of sexual subjectivity bears a racialized dimension—one that shields Delamere from the violence that is so swiftly invoked against Sandy.

The sexual dimension through which the rights of black citizens are abjured in the novel amplifies the cruel irony Chesnutt deploys to examine the limits of equal rights discourses. That dimension cuts across multiple forms of subject recognition and the ways that both the law and the novel more generally ignore how kin, inheritance, and economic participation can be impacted by legitimated or illegitimate sexual contact. The "ethical purpose" that is at the heart of Chesnutt's novel reaches its sharpest inflection with the specter of sex in this slippage between the recognition of kinship and the stark reality by which black people were being disenfranchised and held to a radically different standard of sexual behavior.[42] Chesnutt evokes this slippage by focusing the anti-suffrage campaign on the transgression of miscegenation, which effectively makes the campaign for curtailing black governance about sex, sexual contact between races, and the contracts that either legitimate or criminalize sexual contact. By forcing his readers to inhabit a reality in which sex itself unwinds any prospects of an egalitarian future,

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[42] Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition,* 204.

Chesnutt rejects the progressive faith in the law and reveals racial and sexual disgust to be powerful forces in the dismantling and restriction of racial equality under the law. In the end, Chesnutt observes a keen awareness of the rhetorical frameworks around sex that can be successfully mobilized in order limit black civil rights. It is from the restrictive limits of those frameworks that he attempts to break free by fracturing heterosexuality writ large and reaching to other, queerer formations of kinship and literary representation.

4. Queer Melodrama and the Ends of the Realist Present

The structural dynamics that Chesnutt makes evident through the institutional protections on white reproduction and the pathologization of black sexuality come to a head in the novel's explosive conclusion. But at this juncture, the novel shifts from a somewhat heavy-handed realism in its critique of structural oppression, toward a melodramatic depiction of the radical re-ordering of the lines of kinship, intimacy, and hetero-sociality that had previously defined the novel's literary mode. The break into melodrama, a mode defined by implausible events and sensational action, (such as the death of Miller's child and the simultaneous illness of Carteret's), in this case indicates the limits of realism's ability to document social change in the face of the regressive power structures it has documented to this point.[43] These re-orientations radically

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[43] Chesnutt's deployment of melodrama, and its emphasis on the hidden, grandiosity, and Manichean conflict also circulates on a division in gender; the breaking down of formal binaries between realism and melodrama also implies a slippage in gendered power. Linda Williams extends this observation by noting that the connection between raced and gendered power can often be seen in the way "differently raced and gendered persons have played the race card and parlayed victimization into melodramatic forms of power." I believe we see the inverse of this formation in the novel's end. Williams observes that literary examples, if not exactly melodramatic in style or form (since as a genre melodrama is usually confined to either theater or cinema), since many novels (notably *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *The Clansman*, both of which circulate racial and gendered threats and promises) have been produced as either theatrical or cinematic melodramas, there is a proximity between melodrama's literary exponents and the formal genre itself whose stakes in race and gender are most evident in the slippages of the literary genre. Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*

shift the novel's starkly drawn racial lines, which are also kinship lines. At the novel's conclusion, Chesnutt forces contact between the two sets of characters (Miller and Carteret, and Olivia and Janet) who in turn represent the public and professional component of justice (Miller and Carteret), and the formations of kinship through which reproductive futurity are secured (Olivia and Janet). Along the way, the recalibration of intimacy that Chesnutt describes at the novel's conclusion ruptures the novel's realistic form in both its tenor and content, but also in the affective attachments separately between men and between women in the novel's final drama.

The novel brings about its resolution in two ways: one, through depiction of the Wellington insurrection, in which the white populace took arms and unseated black political figures, terrorizing the black population in the process. On the other, the insurrection and its ensuing violence return the novel to its concerns about reproductive futurity. The death of the Miller's son and the second, nearly fatal ailment of the Carterets' infant not only contrasts the kinds of futurity available to white and black families but draws the Carteret and Miller families together again. Where racial animus and the suppression of Janet Miller's inheritance has separated the Millers and the Carterets, the two families convene in a final bid to save Doddie. In the process, the novel redraws intimacy, kinship, and genealogy in ways that queer the normative structures of the postbellum South, and introduce radical new possibilities of understanding between the Carteret and Miller families. Through this violence, Olivia Carteret and Janet Miller are bound together in a rediscovered kinship, re-orienting their understanding of femininity, marriage, and reproduction. Conversely, Dr. Miller and Major Carteret are drawn into a shared

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(Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001), 7. For a discussion of feminization and melodrama in the novel and realism as a masculinist form, see E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp 72-74. See also Lori Merish, "Melodrama and American Fiction," in *A Companion to American Fiction 1780 - 1865*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 192–203, 192.

affective bond that re-shapes the racial animus Carteret had for Miller into respect, into a new sociality of transparently shared emotions. Ultimately, the triangulation of the two genders on these new lines of kin and affective connection comprises a new relationality between the families that is queer because of the gendered, racial, and reproductive structures that it re-conceives.

Two components of the books final architecture frame how Chesnutt's novel acts as a queer critique of U.S. racial and gendered regimes. First, the formal turn to melodrama that the novel undergoes towards it end, and second, the way in which the novel uses a kind of triangulation around the child to re-shape gendered relations between pairs of men that were otherwise disaggregated on account of race. The mix of genre-shift and homosocial triangulation is informed by recent work on Chesnutt and the particularity of reconstructing genealogies of black queerness around the turn of the century. Recently, Don James McLaughlin suggested that Chesnutt's *Conjure Tales* provide an example of what he calls the "queer fantastic": a mode of aesthetic formation and genealogical connection that re-constitutes oral tales and cultural traditions for black Americans that survive the trauma of slavery.[44] With regard to Chesnutt, McLaughlin suggests that the queer fantastic breaks the representative frame of realism; it "twist[s] the relation between narrative object and its history, bends the past toward the present by dissolving the conditions for originality and continuity, while keeping knots of materiality in the balance."[45] In McLaughlin's formulation, the material realities of enslavement and their afterlives not only shape the ways in which storytelling in the postbellum African American

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[44] Don James McLaughlin, "Inventing Queer: Portals, Hauntings, and Other Fantastic Tricks in the Collected Folklore of Joel Chandler Harris and Charles Chesnutt," *American Literature* 89, no. 1 (March 2017): 1–28.

[45] Ibid., 21.

community inhabit time and space, but they also queer the reality of historical narratives by being at once continuous with a transatlantic past, and yet occupying genealogies that are radically impossible to reconstruct. The queerness was evident, as he suggests, even in the perception of storytelling itself and in the way blackness and queerness both work outside of and challenge American heteronormative frames.[46]

Chesnutt's model of queer non-normativity in *The Marrow of Tradition* does not follow the fabular, fantastic model that McLaughlin advances. Nonetheless, McLaughlin's framework for attaching narrative form to differential expression on racial and sexual lines is instructive. *Marrow*, though nominally a realist novel, abruptly breaks into melodrama as its plot intensifies and as the conflict between the Carterets and the Millers reaches a crescendo. In this way, the movement towards non-marital and non-normative forms of affiliation coincides with a break from realist representation and a turn to melodramatic events and sensational action that shows realism's limits in representing social change. Melodrama itself as a mode, as Linda Williams suggests, involves a gendered shift from the purportedly masculinity of realism to the feminine. The shift to melodrama, in this articulation, wraps gender expectation into literary form by implying that the emotional "transport" of the reader provides a non-rational framework that the realist novel eschews. [47] Chesnutt's attention to the formal characteristics of his novel is aware of

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[46] To archive the distinct formations and histories of black queer experience, E. Patrick Johnson proposes "quare" studies; reaches back, as Johnson suggests by disaggregating "quare" from "queer," at the level of dialect. E. Patrick Johnson, "Quare Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2001): 1–25.

[47] Melodrama has strongly gendered associations, largely as the feminine counterpoint to realism's general masculinity, some of which stretch back (in terms of melodrama's intervention in U.S. racism) to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Linda Williams provides some useful contexts in assessing melodrama as a site of affective failure, in not being "transporting" to the feelings of the reader. Her discussions show that a reliance on affective investment can show the dual sides of affects appeal to political ends; the reliance on pathos can mark an artistic limitation even while that pathos reaches

the queer valence of emotional appeal. For Chesnutt, the verge into queer, unfamiliar, and gender-disrupted attachments disrupts the normative order by which the South segregated communities, kinship, and civic roles on a racist basis. Much earlier in the novel, Miller describes the "queer sensation" of railroad segregation and his displacement from his upper-class car to one filled with workers and women (40). In this sense, queerness means disruption at the level of narrative form, gender representation and contact, and the radical upheaval of the racist structures of power whose violence Chesnutt exposes across the novel.

The novel's break into melodrama is queer in this abstract sense, but also in the way it shifts the gender roles that it triangulates around Doddie Carteret and reproductive futurity: ultimately, Chesnutt invites a queer intimacy on the part of Miller and Carteret and alters the representation of sentimental femininity for Olivia and Janet. These two shifts shape the aim of the political futurity that the novel calibrates in ways that take the crises of its diegetic present representation and suggest the possibility of social change that could emerge but are by no means assured. The shift in gender and novelistic form thus culminate in a queer break in time. The staging of melodrama occurs in two modes: first, by a temporal acceleration that compresses the novel's final events; second by the sensation of Miller and Carteret's interactions, especially Miller's dramatic rejection of Carteret's appeal for aid. When Doddie Carteret falls into yet another illness following the insurrection and riots that have destroyed Miller's hospital, killed his son, and rent the town, Carteret is forced to appeal to Dr. Miller in spite of Carteret's previously expressed belief that his belief in the "purity and prestige of our race" prevents him to acknowledge Miller as a professional of any class standing equitable with a white man (47). Upon learning that Miller is the only doctor capable of performing the challenging surgery that

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towards a political message. In this relay between art and politics, melodrama plays an important mediating role. See Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 11-23.

could save Doddie's life, Carteret speeds to Miller's house to enjoin his aid. When Miller rejects Carteret's request, he appeals to "a just God in heaven," declaring that Carteret's son's death will force Carteret to deal with the consequences of his actions. When Miller declares that "as you have sown, so may you reap!," he moves the novel into amplification of the affective differences of loss that intensifies the melodramatic atmosphere created by Carteret's rush in the drama of this reaction. In so doing, Chesnutt suggests that any sense of justice in his novel must break from realism's depictive mode in order to acknowledge the political impediments to contemporary social change.

In spite of the catastrophic trauma that Miller experiences and the fear and shame that drive Carteret to seek his help, Chesnutt draws the two together in a final confrontation, inverting the dynamic of Carteret and Miller's first encounter at the novel's commencement. When Carteret seeks Miller's help, Chesnutt draws an ironic contrast out of the cruelty of Carteret's racism and his culpability in conspiring to prompt the insurrection. In their final encounter, Chesnutt draws the two men together through an unequally shared cruelty of justice, which is represented in part by Carteret's dependency on Miller at the moment when his own reproductive future is in crisis. Writing that Carteret becomes "conscious of a certain involuntary admiration for a man who held in his hands the power of life and death, and could use it, with a strict justice, to avenge his own wrongs," Chesnutt creates a new dynamic between the two based on admiration and power (191). The shift in the power dynamics between these two men draws them into a remarkable of intimacy otherwise disallowed by their racial difference. Instead, a queer relationality fills the vast gap that had separated the two so far by drawing them together despite racial animus and into a shared sense of pain through the rupture of reproductive futurity represented by Miller's loss of his son and the fear that Carteret will lose his. The novel seems to

suggest that any possible future will be contingent on the possibility of the two men renegotiating power between them on different lines than the heteropatriarchal and racist structures that Carteret had exploited and that Miller had, as a representative of the black bourgeoisie, left largely unchallenged.

The renegotiation that Chesnutt invites here forces Miller and Carteret alike to shift their understanding of gendered performance at the exact moment that the novel reaches its most heightened emotional intensity. The compressed time of their encounter, the heightened affective output of the novel's final drama, the intensity of Carteret and Miller's simultaneous anger and compassion force the novel to re-think the standards of gender and sexual contact on which realist novels generally rely. The shift from realism to melodrama jettisons what Michael David Bell has called the requisite "virility" of the realist novel and replaces that virility with a bond between the novel's primary men that borders on the homosocial.[48] A part of this intimacy forms because of a sense of justice that the two begin to share. Though Carteret, despite of his racial hatred of Miller, claims that "he had always tried to be a just man," his appeal to Miller as a professional and as an equal indicate a shift in his sympathies. Chesnutt writes:

> In the horror of the situation at Miller's house—for a moment the veil of race prejudice was rent in twain, and he saw things as they were, in their correct proportions and relations,—saw clearly and convincingly that he had no standing here, in the presence of death, and in the home of this stricken family. Miller's

[48] Bell writes: "Howells came to associate realism with 'masculine' normalcy, and to distinguish it from concern for 'art,' at a time when modern stereotypes of male sexual identity—rigidly differentiating 'effeminate' homosexuality from 'virile' heterosexuality—were being solidified into what sociologists call master-status traits. . . To claim to be a 'realist,' in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, was among other things to suppress worries about one's sexuality and sexual status and to proclaim oneself a man." Michael David Bell, *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 37.

> refusal to go with him was pure, elemental justice; he could not blame the doctor for his stand. (190)

This dynamic is constituted by a conscious form of judgment that is not evident in Carteret's marriage, making Carteret's expressed admiration of Miller remarkable and unique. What Chesnutt performs here is a renegotiation of power between men, however incompletely, that also ties the novel's final possibility of justice to this radical shift in the boundaries of heterosexual power.

The triangulated intimacy Chesnutt constructs between Miller and Carteret is one of the breaks in realist reliance of virility that is important for Chesnutt's final critique. Chesnutt situates homosocial intimacy by removing Janet from the realm of the human writ large as the novel moves into the melodramatic mode. The shift to melodrama intensifies with Janet and Olivia's final interactions, which form the counterpart to the homosocial intimacy shared by Miller and Carteret. However, where Miller and Carteret stabilize their relation to power by virtue of their shared attachment to justice, Olivia and Janet interact through their shared motherhood and kinship.[49] When Olivia appeals to Janet's motherhood in requesting that Miller assist their son, Chesnutt elevates Janet from the bounds of the human, by making her appear like an "avenging goddess" to Olivia. This deification, which intensifies the "power over life and death" that Carteret saw in Miller, has the effect of amplifying the Miller family's loss into a nonhuman authority over the Carteret's in an ironic rejection of Carteret's own quest for supremacy (193). By making Olivia like a "goddess" in her wrath, by making their son a Christ-figure, Chesnutt radically questions the imaginary of whiteness on which the Carteret's racist

[49] Sedgwick is helpful here when she writes that the question of arrangement between genders is "inscribed in the structure even of relationships that seem to exclude women—even in male homosocial/homosexual relationships." See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015), 25.

actions are predicated. As a "goddess," Janet transcends the frameworks of human citizenship that had regulated her life and had made her subordinate. And yet, she does not remove the forms of power that have been invested in Olivia through her inheritance and social position. In fact, Janet recognizes their continuity by refusing Olivia's name and by refusing the money that Olivia, as a form of reconciliation "offers back" to her and which Olivia and her "friends have robbed" from Janet (194). Where Janet had been "nameless all [her] life," she claims a separate form of adjudication for herself, outside of the boundaries of social citizenship and financial transaction that Oliva believes will be effective in turning Janet's heart (195). In this inverse picture, Janet's goddess-like characterization allows her to transcend the boundaries of the civic that circumscribe her life, in a way that shows the illogic of the legal and cultural structures to which she has subject, which have left her abject. It also liberates Janet from the boundaries of marriage and sexual circulation that contained her life. As such Janet and her son leave Miller behind in the realm of the human, a realm that he negotiates through the new intimacy that he and Carteret begin to share in their mutual recognition of justice.

Where Sedgwick's discussion of triangulation isolates "large-scale social structures" that are "dependent on power relationships between men," Chesnutt performs a separate operation: he emphasizes Miller and Carteret's intimacy by removing women who had previously been present from their equation.[50] By revealing that Carteret and Miller's shared object-choice of justice is legally and socially constructed, Chesnutt moves the two outside of the heterosexuality of their marriages and allows the two to negotiate in a fluid gender space.[51] As such, Chesnutt replaces heterosexual intimacy by binds between two women and two men that coordinate

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[50] Ibid., 25.

[51] Ibid., 25.

around the political power of justice, in each case forming a Sedgwickian triangle that reconstitute the novel's tenuous futurity along non-normative lines of kinship, property, and prospective futurity. In losing their son, the Millers gain a new and unstable family in the Carteret's, forming a unit that threatens to unravel at any moment. They gain a son they do not want in what Ryan Simmons calls a "particularly unjust" depiction of the power relationships of whiteness and blackness that protect the Carterets from punishment and cruelly damage the Millers.[52] The unstable reorientation of attachments that contextualize the novel's conclusion between the sisters and between Miller and Carteret means that the novel invests in same-sex gendered political relations and abandons the heterosexual family as the unit of political adjudication. On the one hand, the novel's conclusion can be read as a utopian project because of the way Janet especially ends, as Stephen Knadler proposes, by "bravely confronting the moral dilemmas" that "separate races and cultures."[53] In the end, Chesnutt's depiction, according to Knadler, represents a "double consciousness that opens up a new future space on America's culture landscape" that Chesnutt purposefully "refuses to sketch."[54] We end, once more, with an emphatically cruel optimism—the attachment to a future that is bounded to and predicated on pain and loss, but that nonetheless offers a glimpse towards a future less violent than the present the Millers and the Carterets, differentially, inhabit.

It is exactly that rupture into an unknown territory of possible equity that constitutes the novel's queer gesture. Rather than lingering on the violence, terror, and loss of the Wellington insurrection, *Marrow* charts a pathway towards a shared understanding of justice that could

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[52] Simmons, *Chesnutt and Realism,* 15.

[53] Stephen P. Knadler, "Untragic Mulatto: Charles Chesnutt and the Discourse of Whiteness." *American Literary History* 8:3 (Autumn 1996): 426–48, 433.

[54] Ibid., 133.

begin to revise and reform the structures of racial and class oppression that lead to the novel's violent conclusion. Where realist novels of the period posit remedies to national social problems through the unified heterosexual family, however, Chesnutt re-charts the potentiality of change along lines of homosocial affiliations (between Carteret and Miller) and on lines of shared kinship (between Olivia and Janet) that shift power away from the novel's white figures towards the black figures who have been so cruelly wronged. The alternative modes of intimacy with which the novel ends reorient to privilege negotiations between Janet and Olivia and between Miller and Carteret. As such, Chesnutt reorganizes the justice of the novel's resolution in part by rejecting heterosexual nodes of power. Instead, it replaces the primacy of those attachments with a newly understood sense of justice that is homosocial in structure. When Chesnutt realigns the novel's final power dynamics based on a forced intimacy between men and between women, he forms two points of triangulation by which to evaluate the novel's uneven reproductive justice. These modes of triangulation detail what Eve Sedgwick notes is the way that relation of "sexual alienation to political oppression" forms "the most volatile of social nodes" especially in the United States.[55] Sedgwick's procedures illustrate these hypercharged nodes of race and sexuality illuminating how Chesnutt forces the novel's men and women into alternative modes of intimacy as a method for resolving his novel's fractious plot. And it is from these modes of alienation, and their attendant legal binds on racial and sexual subjectivity that Chesnutt attempts to break free by rupturing the narrative mode in which his novel more generally operated.

The complicated restructuring of intimacy at the novel's end causes heterosexual futurity to evaporate *because* of the exclusive ties of whiteness, kinship, and property on which that futurity is predicated. In that vein, Chesnutt's final chapters indicate a radical break with the

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[55] Sedgwick. *Between Men,* 12.

realism that generally describes the majority of the novel. With the turn to melodrama, Chensutt rejects the effectiveness of his earlier documentary style, which was evident in his depiction of bourgeois subjectivities and his interest in the media public sphere that Carteret uses to prompt the riots. Chesnutt has, in effect, replaced reproductive futurity and the security of contract in both the Miller family and the Carteret family with a new, and extremely fragile, forced intimacy predicated on homosocial power relations between men and the removal of women from those negotiations. The tie that binds the novel's melodramatic conclusion itself shows the fractures of realist form and realist content. It instead culminates in a forced kinship surrounding death that can only be adjudicated through the pairing between sisters Olivia and Janet, and an opposite pairing between their husbands' senses of justice and futurity.

The novel's melodramatic ending and its yoking of a queer intimacy between the characters who refused one another (Janet and Olivia, Miller and Carteret) indicate that the formal content as much as the political inflection of the realist novel was fundamentally evacuated.[56] Chesnutt emphasizes that such optimistic logic is but a functional part of realism's tendency to portray the future as a "foregone conclusion" in the face of all contravening evidence, a tendency and attachment that Chesnutt emphatically critiques.[57] Instead, Chesnutt shows the dangerous limit of the forms of kinship, heterosexual futurity, and rights recognition that were becoming increasingly solidified in his historical moment. He emphasizes that these formations must be faced directly before they can be transformed into something equitable. The

[56] Berlant discusses genre as a "form of aesthetic expectation with porous boundaries allowing complex audience identifications: it locates real life in the affective capacity to bracket many kinds of structural and historical antagonism on behalf of finding a way to connect with the feeling of belonging to a larger world, however aesthetically mediated." I suggest that it is exactly this functioning of genre that Chesnutt wishes to fracture in the novel's final break from realism. See Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 4.

[57] Jennifer Fleissner. *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004), 32.

novel's utopian gesture is not merely in recognizing racism and its manifestations in sexuality, intimacy, and their legal contracts. Instead, by adjudicating intimacy on a queerer line, Chesnutt offers a pathway forward, if not towards a more utopian future, than to a more just one.

5. Realism's Limits: Howells and Chesnutt's Constrained Futures

When William James theorized our perception of time as living in a "specious present"—a present that flits from one's grasp "in the instant of our becoming," he described the perception of time as a kind of deception—a deception that leaves with little feeling of control over the very moment in time that we occupy.[58] The fleeting quality of the present and its indeterminacy makes it a crucial rubric for thinking through both political attachments to the past and to the future—attachments that, in the sociopolitical context of U.S. civil life, are radically segregated by race and sex. Both Charles Chesnutt and William Dean Howells complicate the progressive bent of U.S. progressive narratives, and especially the narratives of development that U.S. literary realism tended to advance, by forcing the inhabitation of this "specious" and unstable present, as a way of critiquing any easy certainty that cultural progress will follow a certain trajectory towards a more equitable future. Moreover, in both novels, the instability of the present forces a rupture in the realist style that otherwise defines both Chesnutt' and Howells's aesthetic projects. Their novels interlock in surprising ways by showing how the theses of progress were in fact unraveling in their very moment—and unravelling in ways that impacted the structure by which civil and social progress were generally imagined to be constituted, that is, around the heterosexual family and its contribution so the economic, reproductive national body. The novels think together—they show, for Howells, the evacuation of the heterosexual

[58] William James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2001), 147.

family as a stable marker of progress, and in Chesnutt the transcendence into new modes of literary structure and affect—namely melodrama—in order to depict what was not yet appearing in either literature or the law: the promise of an egalitarian, equitable future beyond the strictures of white, heteronormative citizenship that predominated in the social consensus.

But these texts also contain unsettling ruminations on the instability of political life, and the fears of that political life fundamentally fracturing into violence. In situating their novels at the intersection of domestic instability and political violence, Howells and Chesnutt together have more to say about heterosexuality's failures across multiple dimensions of social, political, and civil life, and the limits of each of those forms of membership. In Howells, the moment of the labor riot and the subsequent loss of Conrad Dryfoos forces readers to inhabit the present at the level of content and narrative form: first, with the loss of the Dryfoos' son, both the Dryfoos family and the March family consider the ways in which narratives of their own economic and social development—the promises of the good life of the future to which they aspire—seems interrupted or radically changed. The Marches persistent concerns over the shape of their future, a predominant strain of their marital relationship, further amplifies the sense that the social contracts of heterosexual marriage and middle-class accoutrements (such as homeownership) no longer secure the form of citizen belonging that are, by and large, circulated by progressive ideology and by the novel. Secondly, the novel mirrors this content at the formal level in the riot scene especially through the convergence of distinct plot lines and temporalities of the novel converge, culminating in a moment of rupture in which both social and familial cohesion seem irreparably torn. For Howells, the family and marital units no longer secure the promises of U.S. citizenship and growth, which push the realist novel more broadly into a form of crisis; with the decentering of reproductive futurity as a representational mode for progressive aspiration, the

novel seems trapped in a present beyond which horizon it cannot imagine. The specious present becomes a moment of crisis.

From the formal and social ruptures in Howells' novel, Chesnutt extends a hypercharged critique of progressive futurity by showing the ways in which any narrative of American social progress is limited on accounts of race and the social and legal structures that restrict property and futurity to white citizens. Where Howells focused on the marriage in crisis as the mode by which to withhold futurity, Chesnutt instead targets the symbolism of the white child and the privileged legal and social status white children hold in securing the imaginary of the future. In Chesnutt's argument, narratives of U.S. progress are predicated on and secured through the white child, to the detriment of black citizens, who find their rights curtailed or revoked through the network of legal and social procedures for disenfranchisement and dehumanization invoked by the child. These include property, sex and sexuality, stable kinship structures, government participation, and reproductive futurity. Yet, Chesnutt is not interested in merely illuminating how these regimes are mobilized as a mode of historical documentation: he shows how these networks and symbols function in the present and impede, or show to be specious, any idea of aspirational social progress. As such, Chesnutt's critique explores, in a precursory manner, a belief in social change against all odds, against the racial distributions that continually inform optimism's realization—a cruel optimism whose origins are in racialized history more than Berlant's description of participatory capitalist citizenship. Thus, the critique of this novel stands at odds with Chesnutt's publicly professed belief in the prospects of the novel to shape social change. By exposing reproductive futurity and social progress to be imbricated and predicated on the imaginary of the white child, Chesnutt radically critiques that mode of political attachment and investment. Along the way, he, as with Howells, breaks the forms of realism and slips into

melodrama to explore new avenues of affective attachment through which a more egalitarian future might be realized.

Across the two texts, both Chesnutt and Howells show that the political attachment to a futurity based on heterosexual reproduction carries with it structural inequalities that should be dismantled. Howells presents a reading of progressivism's problems that is abortively trapped in the realization of those problems—hence the Marches stuckness. Chesnutt reveals the whiteness around which political futurity is invested in and structured, in order to begin dismantling it. Both novels in tandem produce a strong critique of the structures, economic, familial, and sexual, around which U.S. progressivism operated, and critique the consolidation of power around the heterosexual family, in both the law and the imaginary of the novel. In so doing, while not positing radical pathways forward, they demonstrate in unequal degrees an intersectional analysis of the contemporaneous power structures through which U.S. belonging and becoming operated. In tandem, they suggest that the full inhabitation and awareness of these structures can allow for the reshaping of social and political outcomes. Though none of these changes are realized, by forcing readers to inhabit spaces in which social change is kept at bay, both novelists make a compelling case for a politics that neither becomes mired in the recent past or overeager for a utopian future, but that operates through an insistent, if evanescent, now.

Chapter 4

Queer Backwardness and the Nativist Impulse: The Case of Willa Cather

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> *But he also goes back a long way, and his backwardness is more gratifying to the backward. It is for the backward, and by one of their number, that these sketches were written.* [1]
> —Willa Cather, *Not Under Forty*

Readings of Willa Cather's queer imaginary often begin in a similar place: with the way she reveled in the unnamed and the indirect, both in her life and in her fiction. Her famous essay, "The Novel Démeublé" (1936), provides rich material for unpacking how indirections connected the personal and artistic for Cather. In her claim that aesthetic value lies in "whatever is felt on the page but not specifically named there," critics read not only a literary manifesto but an expression of her resistance to naming what was felt in her own life: queer attachments to women.[2] On the one hand, Cather famously cultivated long term partnerships with women, the most notable being her youthful love of Louise Pound in Nebraska and her later decades-long relationship with Edith Lewis. On the other, Cather publicly repudiated lesbianism and famously condemned Oscar Wilde's public homosexuality.[3] Advice from Cather's correspondence with her literary mentor and friend, Sarah Orne Jewett, helps to contextualize the disjunction between Cather's own feelings and her public pronouncements. Jewett advised Cather: "You can write

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[1] Willa Cather, *Not Under Forty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936), v.

[2] Ibid., 45.

[3] For a through discussion of these competing facets of Cather's life, see Sharon O'Brien, "'The Thing Not Named:' Willa Cather as a Lesbian Writer," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9 (Summer 1984): 567–99.

about life, but never write life itself. And to write and work on this level, we must live on it — we must at least recognize it and defer to it at every step. We must be ourselves, but we must be our best selves."[4] What did it mean, for Cather to be a best self, and to let life inform her literary production from a remove? How did that need to be a best self relate to Cather's sense of her own relationships? In the correspondence between Cather and Jewett, Heather Love offers the alternative intimacy of friendship as a way to read Cather's attachments: beyond the normativity of the family unit, friendship such as Cather shared with Jewett permitted intimacy without nearing the scrutinized category of queerness.[5] That ambiguity is perhaps most symbolized by the counterintuitive way that Cather represented the nature of queer friendship in her fiction: by writing almost exclusively of queer attachments between men.

Many critical accounts of the queerness in Cather's male friendships suggest that she used men as a misdirection, a place to project feelings she otherwise concealed from the threat of public scrutiny.[6] As John Anders observes, however, reading Cather's male friendships as a projection of her desire for women not only flattens their complexities, but obscures the additional identities and experiences those characters channel.[7] Cather's 1918 novel *My Ántonia* helpfully encapsulates the role of male relationships in her fiction by showing how queer male

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[4] Sarah Orne Jewett, *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 249.

[5] Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 74.

[6] As her biographer maintained, Cather's fiction was written on account of her emotional ties to women. See James Woodress, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989). For more on the connection between the male relationships Cather wrote and her queer feelings, see Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, *Cather's Gift of Sympathy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), 174. See also Doris Grumbach, "'Just William' Review of Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice, by Sharon O'Brien," *London Review of Books*, June 25, 1987. For a rebuttal, see Hermione Lee, *Willa Cather: Double Lives* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017).

[7] John P. Anders, *Willa Cather's Sexual Aesthetics and the Male Homosexual Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 6-7.

friendships also inhabited tenuous positions on the fringes of U.S. society and membership. When the narrator, Jim Burden, recounts his youth in Black Hawk, Nebraska and his friendship with the tomboy and Bohemian immigrant Ántonia Shimerda (or Tony), he also remembers an encounter with some of the Shimerda family's first friends, nearby Russian homesteaders Pavel and Peter, whose relationship was difficult for Jim to categorize.

Pavel and Peter's relationship as Jim describes it resonates with a queer aura. But that queerness seems not merely about their gender, but also their nationality. In Jim's memory, "of all the strange, uprooted people among those first settlers, those two men were the strangest" and not merely because of their unpronounceable names, accent, and custom.[8] Though bachelor pairings were apparently common enough in the homesteads, what set these two apart in Jim's mind was their domestic arrangement: he reports that Pavel, the more masculine of the two, would care for Peter, who himself acted as something of a housemaid, always being sure to do the laundry or to go home at night to milk the cow where other bachelors used canned milk. Their house itself stands out especially in Jim's mind. He thought it "very comfortable for two men who were 'batching' [and admired how] besides the kitchen, there was a living-room, with a wide double bed built against the wall, properly made up with blue gingham sheets and pillows."[9] In Jim's memory, the two men build an intimate space that in a heterosexual context would be banal for its aesthetic attention. Details such as the properly made bed that Pavel and Peter share add a queer dimension to their strangeness, even while emphasizing the difference of their Russian origins rather than their unique domesticity. To be an immigrant, in Jim's

[8] Willa Cather, *Novels & Stories, 1905-1918* (New York: East Rutherford, NJ: College Editions, 1999), 733.

[9] Ibid., 735.

recollection, allows the displacement of sexual strangeness onto other signifiers—especially foreign nation and custom, leaving their queerness unpathologized and unremarked.

The domestic comfort of Peter and Pavel's relationship, however, masks the threats they face. When Peter intimates he had "left his country because of a 'great trouble,'" Cather asks readers to question how their domestic partnership relates to the lives they have left behind and the lives they've gained in the U.S.[10] The unspecific quality of the "great trouble" Peter invokes could mean many things—including the possibility they have evaded persecution of some unnamed kind by leaving Russia. That unnamed cause appears to carry over to the U.S. to a degree, given that the two confront stigmatization for the nonconformity of their daily lives. [11] Their difference takes on an additionally abnormal aspect given Peter and Pavel's stated hatred of marriage. When Peter observes that "if he had stayed in Russia perhaps by this time he would have a pretty daughter" like Ántonia, their lack of kinship conformity stands out even more.[12] Jim's recollection of Peter's counterfactual claim of kinship with Ántonia is ambiguous: he does not suggest whether Peter or Pavel have lost or gained in the childless relationship they have in the U.S. Nonetheless, Peter imagines that he, Pavel, and Ántonia form a queer kinship through their shared immigration and non-normativity. Yet, Jim's memory elides the queerness of their kinship and instead lingers on the fact of their migration in such a way that emphasizes ethnic heritage over their shared sexual difference. Jim's elision and Peter's evasive reference to a

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[10] Ibid., 735.

[11] Judith Fetterley discusses the ways in which Peter and Pavel suffer "banishment and stigmatization" in the novel in part because of their relationship and hatred of marriage. Ultimately, Pavel dies and tells his story in Russian to Mr. Shemerida, translated by Ántonia from Russian to Bohemian to English. His death reinforces the outsider status of being queer and culturally other. See Fetterley, "*My Ántonia*, Jim Burden, and the Dilemma of the Lesbian Writer," in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, ed. Karla Jay and Glasgow, Joanne (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 145–63, 150.

[12] Cather, *My Ántonia*, 375.

"great trouble" suggests a different danger: the possibility that immigration to the U.S. does not ensure safety. After all, to be ethnically other, sexually deviant, and to remain culturally distinct marked the trifecta of dangers that U.S. nativists feared in early twentieth century immigration. What unites these three also threatens: the very qualities that make their queer kinship possible also endanger their prospects for U.S. membership.[13]

This particular vignette in *My Ántonia* illustrates a trend in which Cather sequesters queer feelings behind the markers of otherness that were most contentious in the early twentieth century: the identification of ethnic, racial, and cultural difference as threats to the cohesiveness of U.S. civil society.[14] As this chapter contends, the visibility of ethnicity and the opacity of queer feelings constitute a dialectic: by encoding queerness within representations of ethnic or racial difference, Cather conceals informal same-sex relationships from recognition by a social or legal matrix that was increasingly hostile to sexual difference. The strategy is not without problems, however. By tracing discourses of non-white or non-American otherness that themselves had an uncertain relation to American membership, Cather shields homosexual relationships from scrutiny even while yielding to a discourse that conflated queerness itself with the otherness of non-American ethnic or non-white racial identification. For an author whose own relation to a discernable sexual subjectivity was antagonistic at best, Cather's strategy is difficult to discern definitively: the encryption of sexual visibility within the discourses of state

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[13] On the intersection of race, sexuality, and ethnicity in the early twentieth century, see Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2009), esp. 19-54.

[14] The rhetoric of threat to U.S. civil society was evident in immigration reports from 1906-1911, especially the so-called Dillingham Commission Report. See U.S. Congress, Senate, *Importation and Harboring of Women for Immoral Purposes,* 61st Cong., 3rd sess., 1910-1911, S. Doc. 753, 86; U.S. Congress, Senate, *Regulation of Immigration of Aliens*, 61st Cong., 2nd sess., February 4, 1910, S. Rep. 187, 3-4.

scrutiny to which ethnicity and race were subject seems both a subversion of state order and an investment in the boundaries the state enforces.

Cather's critics have long noted how ethnicity and race intersect with her representation of queerness, but they have devoted less attention to the way in which Cather reinforces racial and ethnic exclusion in her depiction of queerness. On the one hand, Cather's approach can be read autobiographically. As Katrina Irving observes, "the problem of ethnicity displaces homosexuality" in Cather as a strategy for representing queerness without giving it a discrete name or cogent set of characteristics.[15] At an autobiographical level, that strategy might have had to do with self-preservation. As Irving concludes, Cather's "frequent concern with ethnocentric assumptions" ultimately "displace[s]" a "split within herself," suggesting that she addressed her own discomfort with visible representations of queer feelings by subordinating them to more readily discernable markers of ethnicity.[16] The deployment of ethnic difference as a sleeper-method for representing queerness has a personal and instrumentalist quality, in this view. On the other, Cather's approach suggests a more carefully calibrated political investment in separating queerness from scrutiny. As Christopher Nealon writes, "homosexuality is not an ethnicity, but neither, in Cather, is it merely hiding behind ethnicity," suggesting that the relations function in an ambivalent circuit, at once as a signifier of a difference to be shielded, and at once as a difference that circulates openly.[17] Nealon's critique emphasizes the way that queerness is marked outside of the norms of social and civic belonging in ways that analogously relate to

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[15] Katrina Irving, "Displacing Homosexuality: The Use of Ethnicity in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia,*" *Modern Fiction Studies* 36, no. 1 (1990):92-101, 92.

[16] Ibid., 92.

[17] Christopher Nealon, "Affect Genealogy: Feeling and Affiliation in Willa Cather," *American Literature* 39, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 5–57, 36.

discourses that described race, ability, gender as being outside of and in need of alignment with neutral white civic membership.[18] For Nealon that circuit provided Cather a method by which to explore deviant expression in public without clarifying her political relation to queerness as a category of experience or identity.

The visibility of ethnicity in the public sphere, in these views, played a central role in Cather's strategy for imagining difference without engaging with the mounting social and civic scrutiny of sexual difference that corresponded with her literary career. According to Scott Herring, Cather's obfuscating slippage between sexual and racial representation is purposeful and consistent. He claims that Cather deploys "racial and socioeconomic classifications" as an "antirevalatory strategy" to defray the recognition of the queer feelings that emerge across her fiction.[19] Yet, as Michelle Abate elaborates, this strategy had significant setbacks because of the rhetorical apparatus that the early twentieth century developed around categorizing ethnic and racial difference. For Abate, the use of such slippery signifiers participates in a rhetorical process that required homogenization within the normative standards of "white and American" citizenship. [20] Ethnic others made that homogenization process especially visible: for those not native to U.S. soil, full citizenship depended on assimilation to U.S. cultural standards; to remain unassimilated is to refuse the neutrality of heterosexual whiteness, and to retain sexually and culturally distinct qualities. The core of the interpretative problem regarding Cather's deployment of queerness alongside racial signifier rests ultimately on what Cather wanted to

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[18] Eric Haralson provides a useful gloss of the flexibility of the word queer at the turn of the century. See Haralson, *Henry James and Queer Modernity*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

[19] Scott Herring, *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 23.

[20] Michelle Ann Abate, *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 100.

protect and what she was willing to sacrifice in so closely aligning queerness with ethnic and racial signifiers.

In this light, there are more explicit and problematic questions of civic membership in Cather's strategy than either Herring or Abate discuss. The way Cather analogizes extranational and nonwhite identification with sexual deviance leaves queer figures trapped between either pathologization or acquiescence to and erasure within the familiar terrain of the modern white and sexually normal citizen.[21] The reactionary current in Cather's fiction lies here: by analogizing queerness with more visible forms of national, ethnic, and racial difference, she reifies the very form of heterosexual white citizenship from which the characters of her fiction deviate.[22] Though her representation of queerness attempts to preserve a categorical slipperiness in order to prohibit the consolidation of non-normative sexual identification, Cather reinforces the normativity of white heterosexuality and the marginalization of queer and ethnic otherness. As a side effect, she forecloses the development of queerness as a politically viable category, both subject to and active within the state. By exploiting the analogy, Cather tries to have her representations both ways, moving her characters between visibility on a racial or ethnic basis and visibility of sexual difference, while never quite seeming to be defined by either. Yet, her strategy leaves queer people trapped by two regressive options. One could either be shielded behind the exclusivity of heterosexual whiteness or, conversely, register one's queerness and be threatened by association with the ethnic and racial subjects whose membership and citizenship

[21] For an interrelated study of the role of racism, American Empire, and regulation of sexual deviance, see Yu-Fang Cho, *Uncoupling American Empire: Cultural Politics of Deviance and Unequal Difference 1890-1910* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), esp. 27-51.

[22] I am less interested in exploring Cather's biographical relationship to her sexuality than concerned with the output of her representations. For a discussion of lesbianism and Cather's biography, see for example. Timothy Dow Adams, "My Gay Ántonia: The Politics of Willa Cather's Lesbianism" *Journal of Homosexuality* 12:3-4 (1986): 89-98.

in the U.S. was both provisional and under debate. As such, Cather locks her queer figures in an impossible conflict between marginalization by expressing undesirable queer traits, or conversely assimilation within the destructive homogeneity of heterosexual social and civic membership.

This chapter traces a consistent theme in her early stories including "The Namesake," and "The Professor's Commencement," in which male queer characters either are either literally outside the U.S. or no longer fit within the modern economic order expected of U.S. subjects. In these short stories, Cather makes queer figures visible in part from their deviation from America's progress and their association with foreignness or expatriation. To recover a lost sense of membership in a changing nation, the queer figures in these stories relive connections to the past to anchor their sense of belonging. This strategy anticipates the procedures in *The Professor's House* that attempt (and ultimately fail) to protect queerness within the white racial privilege of a more homogeneous past. With *The Professor's House*, I uncover how the relation between Professor Godfrey St. Peter and his former pupil Tom Outland associates the queerness of St. Peter and Tom alike with the outsider status of the long-lost Native Americans they study. When viewed together, these stories and novel illustrate how Cather's concealment of queerness behind other signifiers ultimately causes collateral damage that complicates the vision of queerness we can recover from her fiction.[23] Moreover, the transit between the early fiction and her novel indicates a shift in Cather's attitude towards sexual difference, indicating how the circumstances of queer life had become even further minoritized by 1925 than had been circa 1902. More problematically, shifts in her fictional approach indicate a collapse in Cather's

[23] Herring, *Queering the Underworld*, 23.

representation of intersecting, coalitional subjectivities that together could resist regimes for exclusion of sexual and racial difference alike.

My reading elaborates on an unexpected connection between diverging views of the way Cather's representation of queerness turns towards a lost, less complicated past in order to evade the sexual categorizations of the early twentieth century. In Walter Benn Michaels' view, Cather's reach to the past is an attempt to create a cultural continuity that was being erased by the radically changing genealogical makeup of the country. For Michaels, Cather "deploys homosexuality on behalf of nativism and, in so doing legitimate[s] the homosexual as the figure for a purified American identity."[24] As Michaels explains, a problem with locating queerness in the past is the threat of reifying a fantasy of a more racially and ethnically homogeneous America. Though addressing a nativist undercurrent in Cather's fictional strategy, however, Michaels violently suppresses the way that Cather's queer characters are consistently in danger of regulation, exclusion, or death. Excavating the damage of queer experience, Heather Love conversely describes how Cather's queers reach backwards in a melancholic return to pre-sexological society, one liberated from the need to be categorized. By evoking the past, she attempts to preserve modes of public identification that were fast becoming obsolete under the modern sexual binary. What Love calls Cather's "queer backwardness," or the turn toward the "difficult and the outmoded" as a way of protecting queer feelings from twentieth century regimes for policing sexuality, however, aligns in a limited way with Michaels' observation of

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[24] Michaels claims that homosexuality in Cather's corpus produces pluralism as a revanchist distraction from the economic and political upheaval of the early twentieth century. In Michaels' view, "The Namesake" and *The Professor's House*, circulate a nativist ideology by replacing genetic genealogies with cultural genealogies. Michael's polemically suggests, however, that homosexual offered a kind of transcendent citizenship in its reach to the past that is dramatically at odds with the lived experience of queer people. The argument seems more in service of provocation than interested in the nuanced experience of marginalization that Cather's fiction depicts, if problematically. Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, Pluralism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 45.

Cather's racially purified fantasy.[25] Putting the two in conversation illustrates how Love does not account for the way Cather's backward reach is also an expression of nostalgia for a moment in which white queers were not associated with racial and ethnic otherness and degeneracy.[26] At stake for Cather in being queer was, put in another way, to lose the threats that accrue to masculinity and whiteness.[27]

Cather's slippery queerness, then, must be understood in tandem with the violent structures it also reproduced. By exploiting the association and yet nonidentification of queers with racial or ethnic difference, Cather attempts to dissociate queers from the logic by which racial minorities were made other or by which their rights as national members were thinned. In other words, Cather's crises of queer feeling function by excluding people of color and emphasizing the privileges that difference threatened to dismantle for white queer subjects. We can understand Cather's ambivalence to queerness in these terms: as maintaining white privilege in a world where sexual deviance and racial difference acted contingently. But it is also a way of capitalizing on the pain of erasure of queer subjects without engaging with the broader, intersecting regimes for minoritization that cut across lines of sex, race, and ethnicity. Staged in this way, Cather maintains a sustained concern with the shifting boundaries of citizenship by acknowledging the U.S. regulation of national membership around sexuality. To stray from whiteness, much as to stray from sexual normativity, implied separation from the confines of full

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[25] Love, *Feeling Backward*, 73.

[26] Ibid., 73.

[27] The re-categorization of European ethnic minorities as white is relevant to a discussion of sexuality because incorporation of European ethnicity into whiteness gave space to additional category of deviance that had not previously been codified. For a discussion of the hardening of racial categories that also occurred around this time, see Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, New paperback edition / with a new forward by the author, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 7.

U.S. membership more generally. The fear of becoming identifiable within a discourse similar to those that isolated race and ethnicity, as we will see, ultimately reinforces the very policing of sexual non-normativity that Cather wished to avoid.

1. Unnamed Queers and Named Deviants: The Models of Cather's Early Fiction

Cather was sometimes much more she was more direct in associated queerness with national displacement in her earliest short fiction than her later investment in the thing not named might suggest.[28] Cather's short stories "The Professor's Commencement" (1902), and "The Namesake" (1907) provide a prelude to the subtler way she approaches queer affects of non-belonging in *The Professor's House*. In tandem, the two stories raise questions about the U.S. imaginary of what constitutes citizenship in part because they look to the past to lament the requirements of citizens in the progressive era. In both cases, the exclusion of characters in the stories from normative state structures—like kinship, marriage, or the nation's economic growth—raises melancholy feelings from being unrecognized by or irrelevant to the modern state. In exploring peripheral status, they evince a longstanding practice in Cather's oeuvre by which the queer figures of her fiction either conform to or resist assignment within existing social, civic, and legal categories of membership.

"The Professor's Commencement" begins a trend that reaches its apex much later in *The Professor's House*: it depicts the retirement of Professor Emmerson Graves and his longing for a long deceased male student with whom he once had an intimate relationship. The story lingers on the melancholy of that loss and it portrays its titular professor as out of step with the

[28] Sharon O'Brien provides perhaps the first and most notable exploration of the ways in which this quotation suggests a kind of queer hermeneutic for Cather more generally. See O'Brien "'The Thing Not Named,": Willa Cather as a Lesbian Writer. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9 (Summer 1984): 576-99, esp. 576-77.

characteristics of social membership in his contemporary moment, especially narratives of national development, imperialism, industry, and family.[29] Themes of sexual and economic difference interlock as Cather documents the ruminations of Graves, a high school teacher in a "great manufacturing city" that represents U.S. economic progress by shipping its products "to all parts of the known world."[30] Preparing for retirement ceremonies after a 30-year career, Graves ruminates on his failure to make a liberal arts education relevant for a student body that will enter a global industry by finding employment in the local steel export industry. While emphasizing that Graves feels an obligation to broaden his students minds beyond the practical requirements of their labor, Cather also suggests the instruction itself holds an erotic potential for Graves. When writing that the professor's "intellectual passions" seem as "the haunts of his courtship days are to a lover," she suggests that fills an empty part of his life (137). For a man who never married, education as a form of courtship fills a normalizing social function for Graves, placing his work adjacent to the institution of marriage. But Graves fails to conform in other ways as well, especially through his lack of contribution to of U.S. progress through reproduction of U.S. economic and gendered institutions beyond the national borders due to what Cather describes as his frailty and his irrelevance to the local export industry. In describing Graves' outmoded life, "The Professor's Commencement" explores the limits of belonging for a queer figure whose failure to modernize places him outside of the U.S. ambition to extend its economy and influence more broadly across the globe.

[29] Jonathan Goldberg argues that the femininity of Professor Graves helps to inform the queer relationality between St. Peter and Tom Outland. Goldberg observes that "the awful fear of having missed the chance to love" stages a conflation between the two depictions of Professor St. Peter that amplify exclusion. See Goldberg, "Strange Brothers," *Studies in the Novel* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1996) 322-335, 325.

[30] Willa Cather, *Willa Cather: Twenty Four Stories* (New York: New American Library, 1987), 135. All quotations from both "The Professor's Commencement" and "The Namesake" are from this edition and quoted parenthetically.

Professor Graves' passion for education and for his (primarily male) students explains his choice not to contribute to the nation's economic project; it also forms a queer kinship between himself and his pupils.[31] From the start, Graves describes his contact with his students as an "innate love of watching the strange processes of the brain" of students that he ushers into adulthood (134). This love affair transcends scholarly obligation—when Graves relates his preparation for his students' commencement orations, he depicts them in terms similar to marriage. Staged in a chapel, the professor wonders, "how many, he asked himself, had kept their vows" as they left school and took their assumed place as employees in industry (137). When Graves indicates that "his real work had been to try to secure for youth the rights of youth," she indicates that his marriage-like connection to his students aims to preserve youth itself. That attempt protects his attachment to his students in turn against the progressive needs of a growing economy, conforming to which would remove them from the queerness of their marriage-like relation (136). By metaphorizing the act of education as a kind of marital contract, Graves legitimizes the erotic act of education with the language of state-recognized intimacy that would be unavailable between men. Moreover, he suggests that their shared vow, by being a "right of youth," is a natural right to be defended above other civic commitments. These attachments are ephemeral: despite the professor's nostalgic, marriage-like attachment, he laments how youth "forget[s] its sources, physical and mental alike," moving on to other affairs and leaving its past attachments in an unacknowledged past (134). Rather than securing a stable social position through the marriage-like relationship of Professor Graves and his students, Graves appears either outmoded or a failure due to his inability to impart a lasting legacy—physically or intellectually. As a result, the city to which he has dedicated his 30-year career

[31] While the story does once reference that girls are present in Graves' classroom, it primarily suggests that his students are "lads" (135).

depresses Graves: he describes it as a "scene of bleakness and naked ugliness" that "follows upon the fiercest lust of man," contrasting the "lust" of industry with the eroticism of instruction (135). Cather suspends the Professor here, imagining the vows binding him to his students in a state of queer melancholic longing and loss that leaves Graves locked in a past that his pupils have transcended.

The failure to inoculate his students against global commerce, more importantly, places his queerness at odds with the global reach and economic value of American industry. When Cather describes how the town's products are exported "to all parts of the known world" from Siberia, to Australia, to the "virgin soil of Africa," she writes that his profession by contrast seems a kind of "arrested development when compared to the forward progress and motion of his students" (139). Here, the melancholic backwardness Graves experiences appears caused by a gendered non-alignment, namely, the failure to participate in a virile image of American industry propagating itself across the globe. To export is to dominate and reproduce the self in territories beyond the nation. But the image itself here has problematic undertones in the way it associates virility with U.S. imperialism. When Graves views his students' commercial interest as a problem but elides the racism of a fetishized "virgin Africa," he laments the boys' growth from objects of his affection into men whose "lust" and commercial appetites merge with a masculine imperial violence. While this masculine lust seems a source of Graves' sadness, he does not critique the racialized violence implied by making virgin Africa productive for America, which signifies their movement into modern masculinity. Excluded from this vision of U.S. progress, Graves' obsolescence in the industrial and imperial U.S. causes him to gaze backwards to a simpler, nostalgic time. That backwards glance, however, also leaves Graves' queer attachment to his students subordinated to an ideology of U.S. imperialism and economic growth that

fetishizes a virgin, exotic, and primitive elsewhere. Like that elsewhere, the virility of U.S. imperial values overrides Graves' subjectivity, identification, and desires, marking Graves a failure because of his lack of contribution to national growth.[32] Ultimately, his inability to fit within the regimes of U.S. economy, empire, and racial domination places his queerness at odds with the terms for defining optimal national membership in his contemporary moment.

In addition to marking Graves as out of step with U.S. progress, empire, industrialization, and social life, Cather associates Graves with the characteristics that nativists imagined to be both inimical and a threat to American progress and development. Amplifying his deviation from the progressive time of his students, Graves' self-identified "arrested development" leaves him an evacuated husk compared to the virility of his productive students:

> Now that the current of young life had cut away from him and into a new channel, he felt like a ruin of some extinct civilization, like a harbor from which the sea had receded. He realized that he had been living by external stimulation from the warm young blood about him, and now that it had left him, all his decrepitude was horribly exposed. (139)

The scene appears to pathologize Graves: the both vampiric and erotic description of education associates Graves with the past and with primitive civilization, no longer able to contribute vital energies even to the generations that represent the nation's future and industry. Worse, when Cather describes his intellectual tastes as a sort of "bigamy," she emphasizes his potential contact

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[32] Deborah Carlin usefully glosses the way that feminist readings of Cather and lesbianism circulate around detecting and decoding deviance. See Carlin, *Cather, Canon, and the Politics of Reading* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 20-23. The role of gender displacement is, as Sedgwick argues, one of Cather's major strategies for representing her own biographical queerness. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on "Paul's Case," Sedgwick, "Willa Cather and Others," in *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 167–76. See also Butler's rebuttal in *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 103.

with the degenerate, the abnormal, or the transgressive (131). These characteristics materially impact Graves' emotional life as one of exclusion, difference, and negative affect that is also both pitiable and abnormal. Later, the Professor's own depression amplifies the psychic aftereffects of a life of difference and a life in which the approximations to state recognition (as in the "vows" of his students") leave him adrift and purposeless. Ultimately, Graves' inability to align with modernity as either a sexual subject or an economic contributor signals his irrelevance to a nation whose own modernization depends on exporting its industry and politics across the globe, especially to supposedly underdeveloped and racially distinct nations in South America and Africa.[33] In that context, the Professor's attachment to a sentimental past appear both nostalgic and anti-modern, associating him with of an "extinct civilization" where gender, sexuality and race were each less rigorously binary.

As it turns out, Graves' nostalgic attachment to the past has a backstory from earlier in his career: it originates from the death of a former male student with whom Graves had fallen in love. Graves' separation from U.S. orders of progress appears to stem from this lost love, such that his queer feelings stall him in time and cause a break with narratives of U.S. progress (140). Cather indicates that his decision to remain in his industrial town originated from a desire for a "genius" he encountered years before:

> The reward of his first labors had come in the person of his one and only genius; his restless, incorrigible pupil with the gentle eyes and manner of a girl, at once timid and utterly reckless, who had seen even as Graves saw. Who had suffered a

[33] The U.S. literary imagination participated in and helped to construct a vision of U.S. empire that related the establishment of such international power abroad as a next stage in U.S. civilizational development. For a study of U.S. imperialism in Central and South America and U.S. literary production, see Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

> little, sung a little, struck the true lyric note, and died wretchedly at three-and-twenty in his master's hands, the victim of a tragedy as old as the world and as grim as Samson, the Israelite's. (140)

The direct claim of attachment to this feminized student, whose lyric life was extinguished in some unnamed tragedy, is surprisingly direct in its depiction of queer contact. And yet that memory also stunts the Professor's life. After opining over lost love, the Professor subsequently confesses that he had failed as a scholar and an educator when he leaves his retirement party because "they had put a woman's heart in me" (142). By associating Graves' feelings with women, Cather connects his identification with his feminized pupil to the Professor's sense of pastness, failure, and the self-stated "melancholy" that is his predominant affect throughout the story (138). All the descriptions of the Professor's femininity—from his hands "exceedingly small, white as a girl's" to the fact that his sister is a "simplified and expurgated edition of himself, the more alert and more masculine character of the two"—build a queer continuity across time between Graves in his current effeminate state and his long-past moment of queer intimacy with his student (132). The scene is telling for the way it yokes the "manner of a girl" in the "incorrigible pupil" to the Professor's "sentimentalist" characteristics (134). Despite models for Graves' feelings that are as ancient as Sampson, Graves fears that their acknowledgment would be damaging: by framing his pupil as both "timid and reckless" in his gendered behavior, Graves suggests a fear of deviating from normative standards of masculinity that both he and Cather associate with American imperialism, virility, and futurity.

What makes this memory more painful is the fact that the Professor's career was constituted on a radical act of care whose queer intimacy cannot register in a town invested in the masculinist and imperialist order of U.S. narratives of progress and desirable citizenship. It is

also here that we find the limits of his "desire . . . [to] bring some message of repose and peace to the youth of this work-driven joyless people" (140). In connecting the loss of his love with his need to contribute to local futurity, Cather suggests that Graves' queer feelings have no place in a modern, globalized nation. When compared to the American imperial project to reach into "virgin Africa" through the industrial exports, Graves' interest in aesthetic education and *belles lettres* appears an aberration for being not only feminine, but a dandy-like performance evocative of Oscar Wilde, at whose name Cather wrote that "civilization shudders" only a few years before.[34] By contrast, his virile former students' investment in the imperialist project implies that the Professor's educational project for appreciation of the fine arts has failed, compounding his irrelevance in the contemporary gendered, sexual and economic orders. By aligning the professor's "arrested development" with his failure to participate in American imperialism, Cather marks his separation from a racist and heterosexist ideology. Instead of finding this separation a source of ethical agency, however, Graves' resigns to obsolescence and exclusion from the heterosexual civic and national membership with which he does not conform. Instead of vying to transform these systems, Professor Graves accepts his institutional exclusion, allowing both himself and the memory he cherishes of his lost love to fade into the past. As implied by his name, Graves, like a tomb, becomes a kind of dead citizen: marked by ideologies of the past, attached to modes of affection, intimacy, and desire whose lack of reproductive contribution make him inimical to the modern nation.

Where Graves seems irrelevant to the thesis of the modern United States, Cather's short story "The Namesake" (1907) tries to reconstitute a ruptured relation to U.S. not in terms of some abstract sense of membership, but directly under the rubric of citizenship itself. In the story

[34] Qtd. in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 169.

Cather relates how Leon Hartwell, an artist born to American parents in Italy and living as an adult expatriate in Paris, discovered his feelings of citizenship. Cather relates how Hartwell's discovery occurs through an artistic career dedicated to the sculpture of men in the American West and of men who fought in the Civil War. Even given the topical patriotism of his artwork, his younger colleague, Bentley (a student visiting from the U.S.), declares the work artistically unexpected: following Bentley's surprise at Hartwell's nationalist themes "because you're not really an American at all," Hartwell admits that his "citizenship was somewhat belated and emotional in its flowering" (169).[35] This arc suggests both a distance from the nation and a delay in the feeling of belonging that limits the visibility of Hartwell's citizenship.

Differences in place of birth and national upbringing aside, Hartwell and Bentley find a common ground in artistic education as well as in a mutual appreciation for the "restless, teeming force" of men. Much as with Professor Graves, education contains an erotic component in that Hartwell and Bentley celebrate the aesthetic of the male form as well as the valor of military service to the nation through sculpture. As it turns out, Hartwell's choice of subject has a personal dimension. For Hartwell, the attachment to home and kindred arrives with his discovery, upon returning to the United States some years prior, that he was named after an uncle who died as a fourteen-year-old soldier in the Civil War. Rather than defaulting to shared kinship to stabilize his American nationality, however, Hartwell only relates the story of his citizenship after Bentley's observation that the "teeming force" in Hartwell's art can both "dishearten and inflame" (179). The sculpture seems both to arouse and leave the viewer with a negative feeling.

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[35] U.S. citizenship for children of U.S. citizens born abroad is not secured by bloodline community but is entirely contingent on the citizenship status of the parent; citizenship for children is only available to parents who have retained their tie to U.S. citizenship. The limits of this were discussed in the 1910 immigration report to the U.S. Senate. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Importation and Harboring of Women for Immoral Purposes*, 61st Cong., 3rd sess., 1910-1911, S. Doc 753, 86.

The story of Hartwell's feeling of citizenship is thus subordinated to sculpture's evocation of national attachment as both an erotic attachment and a disappointment. Such descriptions triangulate a shared citizenship through an erotic feeling shared between the elder and younger expatriates.[36] Queer feelings of kinship and brotherhood, subsequently, bind the two expatriates together despite their separate birthrights and orientations to the nation of their allegiance.

Cather's manner of representing citizenship has problems, however. Though locating Hartwell's return to his ancestral home in Pennsylvania, she refuses historical references to the reasons for the Civil War itself, thereby erasing the racist conflict of its origins. Instead, the possibility of imagining queerness in this text emerges through an attachment to the past that is predicated on, as Hartwell describes, being able to "for the first time" feel the "pull of race and blood and kindred" (179). "Race" and "kindred," at this juncture, stand in for other feelings of desire: Hartwell relates how, upon traveling to his forebears home, he felt "beating within [him] things that had not begun" to be expressed, suggesting that the feeling of belonging was present in his body and blood—in effect, his racial genealogy—even if not activated in his mind (179). The process reifies a cultural practice of representing the Civil War that, as Tavia Nyong'o suggests, tended to re-instantiate visions of white homogeneous citizenship.[37] The gesture to racial continuity as a way of stabilizing Hartwell's claim to U.S. citizenship helps to override the

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[36] John Anders covers the extensive relationship that Cather's fiction developing relationship to a long history of homosexual aesthetics over the course of her career. As Anders notes, Cather's discussion of art more general works such that "the emotional resonance of her language lends itself to a specifically homosexual eros" in ways that separates it from queer love between women. See Anders, *Willa Cather's Sexual Aesthetics,* 1999), 6.

[37] Tavia Nyong'o discusses the exclusive aftereffects that natural born citizenship has in the public imaginary, specifically around the Civil War and Civil War enactments and shared memories, which emphasize an exclusive whiteness. See Nyong'o, "Race, Reenactment, and the 'Natural Born Citizen," *Unsettled States: Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies* ed. Dana Luciano and Ivy Wilson, (New York: New York University Press, 2014): 76-102, esp.81-89.

visibility of the queer attachment Hartwell and Bentley share in their own memorialization of the Civil War. Moreover, by suggesting that Hartwell's feeling of U.S. belonging stems from a kinship genealogy, Cather suppresses historical backdrop of the most singular re-definition of U.S. citizenship: the birthright clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which elevated *jus solis* (right of soil) and minimized the tradition of *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) in defining citizenship. Eschewing the novelty of this redefinition, Cather relies on a *feeling* of belonging.

Yet, when Cather describes the attachment to home as a throbbing "things that had not begun" within him, she gestures to a sexual arousal that returns the narrative to the way Bentley and Hartwell connected to one another over sculpture's ability to inflame desire. Inflamed feelings, rather than an attachment to kin, center the story's narrative of citizenship. In this way of narrating nationality through an eroticized Civil War masculinity, Hartwell and Bentley discover a shared queerness in what Christopher Nealon calls an "affect genealogy." As Nealon describes, such a genealogy emerges from "pursing the dream of another kind of nation and family . . . whose members cannot see one another but feel nonetheless the uniting bond of their emotion."[38] Nealon's formula illuminates the dynamic between Hartwell and Bentley, for whom a feeling of citizenship across time and space emerges through a queer bond to a lost past in the form of erotic sculptural depictions. In this story's iteration, queer affects usher in a feeling of racial belonging to heal a gap in the citizenship of an expatriate. Ultimately, in Hartwell and his students' shared understanding of the aesthetic value of the male form, Cather allows Hartwell and Bentley's conversation to circulate around queer feelings to express their citizenship and belonging in the first place.

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[38] Nealon, "Affect Genealogy," 11.

By subordinating the queer feelings that subtend Hartwell and Bentley's discussion of citizenship to the logic of race and kin, Cather conceals queerness within a rubric for recognizing citizenship that was increasingly important in the early twentieth century: one that valued homeland, cultural homogeneity, and kinship. But where Walter Benn Michaels reads the story's queer attachments to the past as a way to privilege cultural over genetic continuity in an age of immigration, Cather instead inflects the queer attachment to the past with feelings of loss and negativity.[39] Cather's innovation is to subordinate queerness to the discussion of those more familiar attachments. After "The Professor's Commencement" documents the dangers nonalignment with national progress and reproduction, Cather conceals queerness behind a familiar discussion of white and antebellum kinship, allowing the institutional security of racial privilege to reduce the threat of Hartwell's queer feelings. Instead of consolidating the domains of queerness as a specific organizing feature for this community, Cather emphasizes their liminality, suggesting that queer expression is impossible to present in public.[40] Between "The Namesake" and "The Professor's Commencement," Cather draws out two dynamics in representing queerness that she consolidates later: the worry over lost birthright and historical kinship, and the melancholic desire to reach to the past to simpler moment in the American regimes for subject identification. The stories foreground two dynamics that will appear in *Professor's House*: first, nostalgia for a moment of a different social and sexual hierarchy, in part represented by the earlier racial stratification; and second, a question about belonging that is

[39] Michaels' instance on reading against the grain of the text, however, misses a critical point in the structure of Cather's "homosexual" figures: their melancholy attachments with racial or ethnic others who themselves are outside of the bounds of normativity or who press against citizenship by birthright. Michaels' schematic dismisses the very real policing that queer figures endured with increasing intensity in the early twentieth century, forms of policing that were evidently apparent to Cather and against which Cather's fiction reacts. See Michaels, *Our America,* 45.

[40] Love, *Feeling Backwards*, 75.

indexed to uncertainty about birthright and placement within the modern nation's bureaucratic boundaries. In the early period of Cather's literary career, her fiction indicates a deep consideration of the institutions that were both identifying queerness as a discrete identity category and making that category deviant and undesirable. As we will see in *The Professor's House*, by 1925 the security offered by preserving citizenship through attachments to white kinship or through participation in the modern economy and reproductive futurity was far from assured.

2. To Be White and Queer: The Protectionist Implications of Cather's Fear of Queer Degeneracy

When Cather reveals that Tom Outland, a deceased yet central character in *The Professor's House,* was orphaned in his infancy and subsequently "without a birthdate," she destabilizes the affective genealogy that grounded queer belonging in "The Namesake."[41] Where Hartwell stabilized his nationality through a kinship relation tied to his family's Pennsylvania home, Cather leaves Tom comparatively unmoored: she cuts Tom adrift from any genealogy, positioning him as a child of "prairie people" and "mover people without any ties to stabilize him (98).[42] Having lost his family and evidence of his birth alike, moreover, Outland's relationship to

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[41] Willa Cather, *The Professor's House*, (New York: Vintage Classics, 1990), 104. All further citations in main text.

[42] Jessica Rabin notes the ways in which gender and territorial crossing couple in Cather's fiction. She connects gender and territory in *My Ántonia* to the role of national identification in *The Professor's House*. As she writes, "Tom's questionable sexual orientation—like Louie [Marsellus'] gender transitivity . . . serves to remind us of the importance of Crossing in Cather's novel. Crossing plays a prominent role in class and racial issues in the text as well . . . [although] the only people of color who receive any mention are the dead native Americans." Though Rabin notes how "ethnic and racial issues suffuse *The Professor's House*," her assessment leaves the dialectical relation of sexuality to racial representation more of a circumstance than a conceptual strategy, which is what I wish to uncover. See Rabin, *Surviving the Crossing: (Im)migration, Ethnicity, and Gender in Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, and Nella Larsen*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 27-79, 61.

legal frameworks of belonging by either kin (*jus sanguinis*) or land (*jus soli*) lose their clarifying authority for securing his feeling of belonging. *The Professor's House* documents the structures of feeling that result when affective ties other than birthright or attachment to lost kinship stabilize national belonging for queer subjects. Though the novel's present day occurs some years following Tom's death in World War I, its primary diegesis centers around Tom through reflections by Professor Godfrey St. Peter and his family.[43] In remembering Tom, the structure of the novel repeats that of "The Professor's Commencement" by recovering St. Peter's longing for a lost intimacy, mirroring Professor Graves. Here, however, a more complex affect genealogy connects St. Peter to Tom, one that differs by interrupting St. Peter's progression as he moves towards retirement and time with his wife. Memories of Tom, in this case, rupture an existing normative relationship, queering it even as it reaches a clear narrative destination in retirement and late-life marital normalcy.

Though devoting the primary diegesis to St. Peter's contemporary life, his melancholy, and his desire for a lost past, the novel also has a deeply political target: it explores how St. Peter's melancholy stems not from some abstract sense of non-alignment with modern life, but from the fact that his queer feelings seem increasingly inimical to the national institutions of the twentieth century. The conflict between St. Peter's longing for Tom and his devolving relationship to his family plays one part. But the novel also charts melancholic affect due to feeling excluded from categories of national belonging, racial membership, and heterosexual kinship. These interlocking modes of being out of step with modern life register in the novel's

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[43] Jonathan Goldberg observes how Tom is central to the entire structure of *The Professor's House* in ways that shape the novel's structures of sexuality beyond St. Peter and Tom. Goldberg notes that since both Kathleen and Rosamond have some sort of desirous contact with Tom, that they "shape[] themselves through Tom's stories" and that "their desires were formed through same-sex ones" leaving sexuality throughout the novel "inflected" by same-sex contact. See Goldberg, "Strange Brothers," 326.

structure: the narration begins in St. Peter's present moment, and then returns to Tom's past when St. Peter edits Tom's manuscript reflecting on his time in the southwest. That act in which St. Peter reaches back to a lost past channels his present-day melancholy and displacement through Tom's memories of intimacy and kinship with Roddy Blake, his former colleague and companion. This interpolated tale—in which the Professor interjects Tom's voice into the novel's present—restructures the apparent domestic tranquility of the St. Peter family, lacing it instead with queer affects that appear to have no place in the contemporary world of the novel.

Long before readers are introduced to Tom when the interpolated tale interrupts the novel's plot progression, memories of Tom structure the novel's narrative present. It focuses on the portrayal of the career twilight of Professor Godfrey St. Peter and conflict within the St. Peter family more generally. Tom impacts the characters in various ways. For example, Professor St. Peter's wish to edit Tom's papers derails the completion of his final research project, titled *Spanish Adventures in North America*. After Tom's will bequeathed his patents and wealth to St. Peter's daughter Rosamond and husband, Louie Marcellus, his younger daughter Kathleen and wife Lillian compete over who best can honor Tom's role as an integral part of the family. In a reflection of Professor Graves' dislike of commercialism, St. Peter and Kathleen attempt to separate their sentimental memory of Tom from the Marcelluses use of the economic value of Tom's patents. More significantly, Professor St. Peters' fond memories of Tom contrast with his troubled marriage and his subsequent refusal to move into the newly constructed house he is to share with his wife in retirement. When Cather writes that St. Peter's first impressions were of Tom's "fine–looking" body, his "manly, mature voice" and the "beautiful shape of his hand," Cather charts a sexual tension that feeds off of Tom's secretiveness regarding his past (95, 101). Reflecting on the intimate relationship he shared with Tom as his student and mentee, the

Professor remembers how Tom elicited his fascination, sympathy, and attraction as well as the way that Tom allowed St. Peter to escape of the material realities of marriage, family, and economy by which he largely organized his life. In effect, remembering Tom in his erotic and intimate dimensions allows St. Peter a reprieve from the hegemonic heterosexuality that seems increasingly oppressive for him.

It is precisely this wandering and escapist quality in Tom that both enticed and threatened when Tom first entered the St. Peters' family's life. Tom's secretiveness eventually caused Lillian St. Peters suspicion: eventually, she became "fiercely jealous" of Tom and mistrusted the "secretive something to do with the mysterious Roddy Blake," Tom's close friend from his prior life in the southwest (38, 152). These two fears show the visibility and vigor of Tom's queer aura and the contingent threat that Tom signifies for Lillian's idea of a normative life. In fact, St. Peter himself describes Tom as a "second infatuation" that destabilizes his marriage, placing Tom as a threat to the normative institutions that secure Lillian and St. Peter's domesticity (38). When St. Peter considers Tom's life while editing the manuscript documenting Tom's earlier life, his memories prompt St. Peter to imagine leaving his family altogether. While the St. Peter family travels in Europe, St. Peter stays behind to edit Tom's manuscripts and wishes instead to travel to "those long, rugged, untamed vistas," of what he calls "Outland's country" (246). Though justifying his return to Tom's country through the need to document for posterity a place "dear to the American heart," that is one of the few "untamed" and uncivilized places in the nation, St. Peter seems more motivated by the opportunity for a communion with his lost pupil that the manuscripts afford (246). Remembering Tom Outland's outsider and unmoored status (both literally as an orphan and figuratively as a traveler in the western frontier) provides the

Professor a kind of comfort in contrast to the domestic life in which he no longer feels he belongs.

The symbolic aspect for the documentation of civic marginalization in "Tom Outland's Story" is the replacement of Tom's lost birthright with a queer kinship: enabled by the geographic isolation and removal from the centers of U.S. culture, the story documents Tom's relationship with Roddy Blake, his long-term companion through his early life, and the way they develop a long-term intimacy. The two discover each other while working in New Mexico, and develop a friendship based on mutual caretaking and adventure. Set in the pre-war period between 1910-14, around the time New Mexico and Arizona achieved statehood, the tale situates Tom's idealized queer fraternity with Blake as a contingency made possible by the pre-statehood territories they inhabit.[44] The placement in time mirrors Tom's own geographic liminality: though Tom would have had citizenship through his birth in a U.S. territory thanks to acts of Congress, Cather locates Tom's birth at a transitional moment from U.S. territory to statehood, which emphasizes Tom's tenuous national membership and his position outside U.S. government and its institutions.[45] Part of their connection is based on being wanderers, on being without family, without company jobs, marriages, property, or other forms of state recognition. The two

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[44] See Susan Rosowski and Rebecca Sloat for a contextualization of Cather's relationship to the southwest, especially her journeys there with Edith Lewis, which situate Cather's reflections in the context of her own relationship and a recollection the intimate them they spent together. Rosowski and Sloat, "Willa Cather's 1916 Mesa Verde Essay: The Genesis of *The Professor's House*," *Prairie Schooler* 58:4 (Winter 1984):81-92.

[45] Territorial citizenship, as decided regarding Puerto Rico in *Downes v. Bidwell* 182 U.S. 244 (1901) was granted by acts of Congress, not necessarily secured by territorial status.

live outside the conditions of mainstream modern life in the early twentieth century, in a time-frame and lifestyle rapidly disappearing from national life with settlement of the West.[46]

In this narrative return to a lost moment in the past, St. Peter remembers Tom's celebration of the "untamed" southwest. The interpolated tale's reach backwards in time functions another way, by interrupting the narrative progress of the novel, removing readers from the domesticity of St. Peter's retirement, his marriage, and the growth of his children. Instead, it situates readers in Tom and Roddy's life on the nation's fringes, as they try to understand their relation to the normative kinship structures and government from which both feel alienated. When he and Roddy Blake discover Anasazi ruins on Mesa Verde in New Mexico, they find a connection to the past that stands in for the kinship genealogy they both lack.[47] When framing the archeological discovery of the Anasazi as representing what "boys like" Tom and Roddy's have to "inherit," Cather claims a kinship across time, race, and culture alike, replacing their lost kinship with an inheritance that skips the timeframes of ordinary family relations (219). The liminality in Tom's Outland's Story allows for a space in which Tom can imagine a cultural belonging on his own terms, outside of institutions that do not recognize his lost kinship or the queer attachments that give his life meaning and vitality. In effect, Tom restructures a kinship genealogy that he lost in his orphanage through his "discovery" of the Anasazi, attaching his

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[46] Melissa Homestead argues that Cather's visits to the southwest during the period of early-statehood informs the backward relationship she depicts between Tom and St. Peter in the novel. Cather's novel builds of the story of an actual discovery of Anasazi artifacts in the pre-statehood years. Melissa J. Homestead, "Willa Cather, Edith Lewis, and Collaboration: The Southwestern Novels of the 1920s and Beyond," *Studies in the Novel* 45:3 (Fall 2013): 408-441, 415. Cf. Goldberg, "Strange Brothers," 323.

[47] Goldberg notes in passing how the Anasazi and the Southwest more generally in "Tom Outland's Story" "function for Cather as it provided a site for homosexual projection." My claim here is that there is a more material resonance and suggestion of displacement and legal liminality. See Goldberg, "Strange Brothers," 331 and 337n18.

understanding of kinship to the legacy of a different race and an ancient culture thoroughly displaced from the rubrics of modern national belonging.

After Tom and Roddy's unearthing of Anasazi artifacts, the major drama of the Tom Outland story lies in his attempt to gain institutional recognition for their discovery. Believing the artifacts to be a significant archeological find that anchors national history, Tom prepares to present their discovery to the representatives of the Federal government and the Smithsonian. The wish for recognition at the institutional level marks Tom and Roddy's shared endeavor with a feeling of queerness: they are outside of state recognition in their work, but also in having a kind of fraternity that flourishes by virtue of their separation from the state and their connection to a lost history. The tribal artifacts themselves index something in the past that affectively resonates with Tom's feeling of being outside modern state membership. When Tom discovers this civilization, which he claims bears a "mark of difference" from the other native tribes, he emphasizes its novelty and strangeness (182). When suggesting that the tribe was distinct because it was "cut off from other tribes, working out their destiny," the strangeness he describes in the tribe reflects the queerness of his intimacy with Roddy Blake by similarly being separated from other forms of society (180, 198).

Despite the comfort Tom and Roddy share on the mesa, Cather shades their experience with the sense of its ephemerality. Being separate cuts two ways: it permits Tom and Roddy's intimacy, but also marks that intimacy as undesirable within the nation. Cather figures their marginalization in multiple ways. Not only are the pair literally at the margins of civilization, but the object that they choose to symbolize their fraternity is both out of time and out of citizenship: the tribe is both extinct and, in being a tribe, of questionable citizenship status. The terms of Tom and Roddy's association—fraternity, physical isolation, intense shared study—separate their

unique environment from national and social institutions, thus emphasizing queerness through their physical distance from the contemporary world and their nostalgia for times past. To reach back to the Anasazi in order to locate the kinship that Roddy and Tom share also attaches their fraternity to a figment of the past that did not survive time, suggesting the relationship's eventual failure. The association with a dead tribe ultimately inflects Tom and Roddy's fraternity with the markers of a past lost from the existing historical record, giving their friendship a sense of nonalignment with modernity. Akin to Professor Graves' dead citizenship, the very thing that draws Tom and Blake together with a shared sense of purpose also attaches them to a past whose value is largely unrecognized by the modern nation.

The identification of an inheritance through Tom and Blake's shared "reverence" for and contact with this "extinct civilization" disrupts a reproductive genealogical tie and displaces Tom and Blake from the kinds of genetic kinship that the progressive state viewed as necessary (180). As such, through the Anasazi, Tom and Blake create a genealogy that, as Lee Edelman would say, is queer because it has no future, replacing genetic reproduction with their intellectual efforts.[48] As a result, Tom and Blake can create a new space for themselves on their own terms. Out on the mesa, Tom imagines a relationship with Blake with a fraternal domesticity that reimagines heterosexual social space: he describes his fraternity with Blake as a "holiday" and a "happy family" and as constituting an environment "so pure" both because of the quality of their friendship and their social isolation.

Once these spaces are established, Cather describes how Roddy and Tom settle into a domestic routine following their discovery of Anasazi tools. Together, their fraternity constitutes a counterpublic: they adapt visible forms of frontier sociality into a newly comfortable

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[48] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

domesticity related to but outside of the predominant culture. As Michael Warner argues, such couterpublics are constituted by a "conflict not only with the dominant social group but with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as public."[49] In the case of Tom and Roddy, they have literally removed themselves from contact with the general public and reform their own relations as a rejection of the recognized forms of domesticity that public life endorses. Their counterpublic status stems from the proximity of mainstream culture, which is always nearby: each night, as Tom "wrote an account of the day's work," Roddy would "sit and read the newspapers" as they imagined keeping their findings away from "vulgar curiosity" (189, 183). Vulgar curiosity resonates doubly here: it implies the separation of Tom and Roddy from the general public as well as a distrust of that public's view of their shared archeological endeavor. Away from that sight in their project, Tom reverentially describes the "stirring [feeling] about finding evidences of human labor and care in the soil of an empty country" which "comes to you as a sort of message, makes you feel differently about the ground you walk over every day" (173). In his lyric description of their time in the remote countryside, Tom describes how the fertile landscape contains a generativity that Roddy and Tom would otherwise lack. Their shared care and intimacy reframes tropes of domesticity and labor in terms particular to Tom and Roddy's in ways that might be familiar to the outside world, even if they seem particular to their shared life.

In a world where degeneracy, anti-reproductivity, and economic frivolity define publicly recognized queerness, Tom and Roddy's discovery gives their mutual labors a purpose and

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[49] Warner's definition notes the public space that counterpublics imagine themselves in relation and opposition to the normative public sphere. I suggest that the public nature of Tom's counterpublic, its relationship and dependence on refashioning deviance in relation to a social world, is exactly what Roddy Blake does not wish to enact through his disavowal of Tom's politics. See Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 112.

generativity made available through their fraternity in ways foreclosed for queers more generally, who are characterized by a reproductive lack. Their discovery also conceivably could grant Tom and Blake national legitimacy by giving them a place in the national narrative through their discovery in ways that would heal their previous wounds of lost kinship as well as economic and cultural marginalization. In Cather's initial description of Tom and Roddy's budding friendship, she seems especially concerned with the limits of what the two could produce. Originally, when Tom and Roddy become "fast friends," it is in the context of their displacement (164). As with Tom, Roddy too was "a kind of stray and had no family," which "made it easier for him to unbend to" Tom (165). Their scenes together recast their labors collective labors as generating economic productivity—but they do so by inviting images of sexualized intimacy as well. When they shared a room and Tom took pleasure in collecting "the coins that lay in the hollow of the bed about his hips" when Roddy slept after a day of labor, Cather connects their shared economy to a strange moment of secret intimacy that evokes sexual contact (162). Though both live outside of normative institutions of intimacy, economy, and productivity, they manage to interpret tropes of normativity for their own purposes and pleasures.

However, the repurposing of normative tropes for their own interests, Cather notes, has its limits. When Tom wishes to become the "pal" that Roddy "needed", a "straight fellow to give account to," Cather on the one hand documents the building of an affinity between the two that constructs a new and queer kinship by virtue of an erotic attraction to Roddy's body. Later, when Roddy cares for Tom after a bout of pneumonia, Tom quips that Roddy "ought to have had boys of his own" (165). Yet, when he observes that "Nature is full of such substitutions, but the always seemed to me sad," Tom laments that their relationship seems to be standing in for

something else, rather than being a thing in its own right (165). Though Tom had previously celebrated the virility of Blake's body—"his strong back and his workman's hands"— that erotic contact appears limited even while it affords a sense of belonging for Tom and Roddy both. Tom and Roddy solve the limits of their "substitution" by turning their labors towards generating meaning from the Anasazi artifacts through their shared labor. By existing in a space apart and by finding "stirring" feelings in the Mesa landscape, Tom and Roddy generate a genealogy, domesticity, kinship, and security in their exclusion and the queerness of their shared encounter (173). But for Tom, their discovery has additional import in that he imagines archeological interest will allow him to have "done [his] duty" by the discovery if he is able to return with "men who would understand it, who would appreciate it and bring out its secrets" (202). Of course, as Tom discovers when he travels to Washington to make those secrets known, there will be no such respect.

Institutional Exclusion and the Limits of Queer Fraternity

When Tom visits Washington, D.C. to lobby his Congressman, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Director of the Smithsonian for the recognition of his Anasazi artifacts, he feels completely alienated at both the bureaucratic and the interpersonal level. In contrast to the intimacy he felt at the Mesa, traveling to Washington seems for Tom uncannily different. Upon arrival, he feels not only out of place but out of alignment with the homogeneous culture of the city. When Tom walks "among the hundreds of clerks [that] come pouring out of the building," he comments on how "petty" and "slavish" they are (209). When reflecting on the married couple he stays with in Washington, the Bixbys, he compares them to "people in slavery, who ought to be free" or who should "be able to breathe free air" again (211). The experience of

exclusion converts Tom's excitement into melancholy. In claiming that the couple's fascination with social events "gave him a kind of low-spiritedness [he] had never known before," and in claiming that the "miserable sort of departmental life" was inseparable from normative heterosexuality, Cather gives Tom a "prejudice against that kind of life" (210, 209).[50] The various social events in which bureaucratic members participate associates the state itself with a gender normativity alien to Tom and Roddy. Cather's description of Tom's alienation from government society in Washington, D.C. not only associates gender conformity with the Federal government as a metaphor, but also amplifies the difference and physical exclusion of Tom's queer fraternity on the mesa, outside of the reach of the state.

When faced with the normativity of Washington's institutions, Tom feels an unaccountable longing for the fraternity between men he experienced on the mesa. Figuring heterosexual bureaucracy as a kind of slavery position's Tom's feelings of exclusion as an injustice, as a limitation on his capacity for free expression since the entrapment of normalcy is underwritten by the government itself. Encountering the frivolous normalcy of Washington prompts his disillusionment with the institutions in which he had previously vested power, which breaks Tom away from the fantasy of inclusion that motivated his journey in the first place. What is interesting here is not that Cather documents a kind of queer fraternity, but that Tom's quest to bring that queer fraternity validity and visibility from the institutions that disallow queerness ultimately fails. Instead, Tom is dismissed by the normativity of the Bixby's heterosexual social and democratic life as much as the normativity of bureaucratic labor, making his exclusion both civic and social. In contrast to the heteronormative sexuality of Federal workers in D.C., Tom and Roddy share something greater that connects their labors and

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[50] Nealon discusses the institutional conflict with what he calls "economically driven heterosexuality" and the federal bureaucracy. See "Affect Genealogy," 36n19.

domestic spaces with an inheritance from the Anaszai, which sets their life and work apart. Rather than making space for reproductivity, their productivity finds generative potential in joint masculine labor. Communing with the earth and with each other, they claim a different productive potential from their shared relation to an extra-national past.

The negative consequences of the socially marginalized queer attachment Tom and Roddy feel while excavating the mesa become more evident after Tom fails to register the Anasazi artifacts in the Federal institutions through which culture is nationalized. Indeed, his experience with the Federal scene in Washington stands in stark contrast to the spaces of shared masculine labor on the mesa, which vitalize the two and that enable their special fraternity. When Outland later feels "utterly ashamed to go home to Roddy" without having secured their institutional recognition, he also reflects on the differences between his and Roddy's vitalized labor and the bureaucratic labor that he longs to have recognize his and Roddy's achievements. After this dejecting scene, Tom writes:

> I left Washington, at last, wiser than I came. I had no plans, I wanted nothing but to get back to the mesa and live a free life and breathe free air, and never, never again to see the hundreds of little black-coated men pouring out of white buildings. Queer, how much more depressing they are than workmen coming out of a factory. (213)

The "queer" and "depressing" feelings that Tom attaches to the bureaucratic government workers contrasts with the value he finds in physical laborer. Such a contrast pits devalued bureaucratic labor in stark opposition to the erotic charge and the special fraternity Tom attaches not only to Roddy's body but to their shared labors in the southwest, which itself also finds a mirror in their

mutual valuation of native labor on the one landscape to which the two find an ephemeral belonging.

By this point, however, Roddy himself has sold the artifacts that they shared and that represented their inheritance, prompting Tom to banish Roddy and dismantle their partnership. By dissolving Tom and Roddy's relationship at the moment of Tom's failed attempt to gain recognition by the Smithsonian, Cather connects his dismissal by Federal institutions with the dissolution of Tom and Roddy's queer friendship. The subsequent rupture between Roddy and Tom cuts two ways: it occurs because of Tom's failure to secure their Federal institutionalization and Roddy's subsequent failure to recognize the significance of their national symbolism to Tom; it also amplifies Roddy's symbolic disinterest in Federal recognition more broadly. Part of what is at stake for Tom that Roddy cannot see is that the artifacts secure a kind of belonging otherwise unavailable to "boys like [them]" (219). When Roddy sells the artifacts on which Tom has pinned so much significance and meaning, they lose the possibility of state inclusion, an always tenuous prospect. In an impassioned outburst from which the two never recover, Tom proclaims:

> But I never thought of selling them, because they weren't mine to sell—nor yours! They belonged to this country, to the State, and to all the people. They belonged to boys like you and me, that have no other ancestors to inherit from. You've gone and sold them to a country that's got plenty of relics of its own. (219)

The trajectory of Tom's anger and Roddy's sadness traces the breach of an unspoken contract that Tom believed permitted a fraternity between "boys like you and me" who had "no other ancestors to inherit from" (219). In effect, the mode of belonging that Tom believes will stabilize

the queer relation he shares with Roddy is one that requires installing a literal artifact from the past within the state itself, as a way of finding state belonging by reshaping the national narrative. Of course, Tom's statement of intentions follows the failure to register his and Roddy's "inheritance" within the institutions of the state. When Tom discovers Roddy actions, they appear to Tom as a double betrayal, leaving Tom unmoored from the shared endeavor with Roddy and the points of contact with the government that he believed could stabilize his belonging. As a result, Roddy's "betrayal" ruptures the possibility of their queer friendship. What is lost to boys like them is less the artifacts themselves, but the prospect of their recognition as subjects within a prejudicial nation.

At the center of this failure lies a mistaken theory: Tom's conviction that the Anasazi relics, through which he has discovered a queer fraternity, could re-shape the institutions from which he desires unreturned recognition, especially the Federal government. Roddy's pragmatic approach more accurately interprets those institutions by understanding the intractable power dynamics of national citizenship. Tom responds by racializing Roddy for his accuracy.[51] In a startling turn, Tom declares not only that Roddy had sold the relics "to a country that has plenty of its own"; he accuses that Roddy had "gone and sold your country's secrets, like Dreyfus" (219). The accusation is stark not only for its cruelty, but also because Tom deploys racist tropes that were used for delegitimizing a claim to American membership against Roddy. Dreyfus, of course, was famously figured in the French media for being an alien traitor; his Jewish heritage

[51] Writing about the role of Jewish figures in Cather, and with regard to Marsellus in *The Professor's House*, Rabin suggests that Cather essentializes Marsellus specifically for his mobility and economy; moreover, his foreignness suggests a potential problem of allegiance. In this context, positioning Blake as a Dreyfus ascribes him politically problematic positions particularly by decoupling him from the nation of his belonging. Blake's queerness becomes especially troubling because it refuses the relations to the state that Tom wishes to concretize, making clear that to refuse state interpolation amounts to a racialized distinction. See Rabin, *Surviving the Crossing*, (2004), 62-63.

was weaponized in newspapers as a signifier of his otherness, of the illegitimacy of his claims to French citizenship.[52] That Tom rejects Roddy for his actions by implying that Roddy has acted as a "Dreyfus" wraps race back into the picture in ways that Jonathan Goldberg have suggested connects a homophobia to racial panic.[53] Though Roddy rightly observes Dreyfus's innocence, Tom's accusation deploys an anti-Semetic legacy to question Roddy's legal rights and state belonging. The rupture deploys race to explode the grounds on which he and Roddy shared a queer fondness—race, more than anything, overrides the possibility of their shared queerness.

By figuring Roddy as a national traitor on account of a racialized betrayal, Tom rejects Roddy's ability to join in contributing to the national by making him an outsider who does not fit within the neutral whiteness of the nation itself. But this division gives the lie to Tom's entire enterprise. The shared kinship he fought to establish through his Anasazi artifacts appears as much of a fiction as Roddy's Dreyfus-like betrayal, a projection resulting from the impossibility of their relationships' durability outside of their seclusion on the mesa. Roddy's observation that Dreyfus was "innocent" and had been the victim of a "frame-up" suggests that Tom's desire to blame him on account of a racialized identification is a distraction (219). Tom justifies his anger by representing Roddy's actions as a rupture of their shared kinship, one that can be understood

[52] For a discussion of anti-Semitism, the Dreyfus affair, and racialized narratives of state treachery, see Leslie Derfler, *The Dreyfus Affair* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), esp. 17-24.

[53] Jonathan Goldberg writes, following Tom's attachment of genealogical significance to his Anasazi discovery, that Tom "he seeks various forms of legitimization for and sublimations of the meaning of those objects in his relation with Roddy … [he] embraces these values to his death as a denial of the bond of friendship and love with Roddy" (334). I think the relationship here has less to do, however, with a denial of a bond but a refusal to accept Roddy's politics surrounding that bond. Tom wishes for a kind of visibility that Roddy is not interested in, and then racializes him as a mode of punishment for dissolving Tom's politics. See Goldberg, "Strange Brothers," 334.

in terms of racial threat to the state itself, thereby using the logic of a state apparatus to contextualize Roddy's betrayal and the dissolution of their relationship.

For Tom, the signification of this backwards mode of belonging would always fail because the two men did not observe the same relationship to the state or to the past, as represented through Roddy's disinterest in the terms of statist inclusion that motivate Tom's interest in the Anasazi tribe. For Tom, queer belonging meant building a relation to the state by inserting objects cathected with significance and "inheritance" for him and Roddy into a hostile state institution. The rift between Roddy and Tom emerges because of their divergent attitude towards inclusion as an ambition for their project and for their friendship. That rift only widens subsequently. Realizing that Tom cannot any longer "trust [him] to fix that," Roddy gathers his coat to leave; he "turned away, as he put his arm in his sleeve," in an image of broken trust and concealed grief that, more than anything else, marks the rupture in their intimacy (222). In this final exchange, the convoluted turmoil between shared labor, racialization, and differential understandings of queer presence or backwardness ultimately dismantle the stability of their domestic feelings. The cause of their split illustrates a profound difference in disposition to the state: Roddy remains disinterested in institutions, in a political removal that Tom cannot understand. Where Roddy resisted the state by commercializing the artifacts that Tom believes could have given the nation a historical depth it lacks, Tom invested in the need to reinforce the state itself. In this sense, Tom's desire for inclusion in the state forces him to elide modes of queer feeling and generativity that make their shared space unique, in a desire for belonging that fails by misreading inclusion's benefits. Roddy refuses the terms that inclusion demands. Thus, he preserves a life outside of the state, rather than acquiescing to the normative institutions that would erase his independence or that would violently mark him as an outsider, as Tom has done.

Cather's attempt to separate queerness from programs of racial exclusion and minoritization must be understood in the context of Tom's failed quest for institutional recognition. Cather tries to mitigate these forms of exclusion by returning to the privileges of whiteness and by dismissing queerness as an identity because that identification was already strongly yoked to racial difference. But the support of those privileges for Tom are, in the end, radically unsatisfying because of what they exclude. That is why, when Cather writes her most melancholy description of queer feeling, she describes Roddy's descent from the mesa as a loss. The loss stems in part from Roddy's ability to return to civilization, yet remaining separate from it, in a way that seems impossible for Tom given his desire for recognition and membership. With Roddy's departure, Tom writes:

> My eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness and I could see Blake quite clearly—the stubborn, crouching set of his shoulders that I used to notice when he came to Pardee and was drinking all the time. There was an ache in my arms to reach out and detain him, but there was something else that made me powerless to do so. (223-24)

For Heather Love, Tom's ensuing isolation, much like the loneliness of St. Peter, indicates a source of vitality in friendships, even in friendships lost, that that neither dismisses nor pathologizes their damage and sadness.[54] Yet Tom also laments Roddy's "stubbornness," just as he reacted negatively to Roddy's rejection of Tom's symbolic investment in the national value of their archeological discovery. Tom's failure allows him to "see Blake quite clearly," perhaps for the first time. That loss of understanding affects Tom at the physiological level, as an "ache in

[54] Love, *Feeling Backwards,* 87-89.

[his arms] to reach out and detain" him.[55] Nonetheless, while Roddy can move back into the world, Tom's investment in the structures that have dismissed him makes Tom "powerless" to reach out. The discrepancies emphasize Tom's incoherent theories about national belonging, which emerge most pointedly form Tom's desire for a normalcy that Roddy doesn't share. Instead, Roddy recognizes in Tom a species of cruel optimism—the longing for the promises of a good life that never arrives for minoritized figures.[56] Unlike Tom, Roddy refuses that deceptive promise to live an independent life in which their fraternity could be self-sustaining, predicated on care, and would not need to be identified by the state to retain legitimacy. In an echo of Cather's own attitude towards her sexuality, Roddy vies to maintain a world apart. Tom's quest for inclusion explodes that wish.

3. Fugitives Queers and the Idea of the Law

The melancholic loss of Tom's queer partnership contextualizes St. Peter's own feelings of exclusion and dissatisfaction with the normal order of domesticity and family kinship in his own life. For St. Peter, to remember Tom is not just to lament his death, but to lament the loss of a mode of queer intimacy that seems impossible to reproduce. From before we hear Tom's story to the moment of the Professor's near death in the attic of his old home, memories of Tom cause a melancholy in St. Peter that separates him from his family. The house itself evokes memories that disrupt the surface-level normalcy of his family: remembering the times when his family was travelling and the Professor was "a bachelor again," St. Peter remembers how "it was there

[55] Adam Ellwanger discusses the ways in which bodily desire connects to loss in Outland's story in an aestheticization of queer abjection. See Ellwanger, "On the Possibility of the Aesthetic Life: Terry Eagleton, Cather's Tom Outland, and the Experience of Loss" *Journal of Modern Literature*, 35:2 (Winter 2012): 52-63, 53.

[56] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 54.

he and Tom Outland used to sit and talk half through the warm, soft nights," a memory that replaces the domestic pleasures of family with Tom and the softness of their fraternity (7).

That memory of softness is both something that connects and separates St. Peter from his family. After a discussion between St. Peter and his younger daughter Kathleen earlier in the novel that reflects on Tom significance for their family, St. Peter falls into a deeper melancholy. Recollecting a unique "something in his voice, in his eyes" that Kathleen and St. Peter believe the rest of the family do not respect, the two try to recover the feelings Tom evoked outside of the material legacy he had bequeathed the family in his papers and in his will (112). Kathleen and St. Peter are saddened that almost none of the family "remembers that side of Tom," who told stories about his time on the mesa, the side who was a member of the family, and the side who was "different from the other college boys" (112). Leaving the "side of Tom" that was "different" about him unnamed, both Kathleen and St. Peter locate his true value in his elusiveness.

Rather than remembering the values of the person himself, Rosemond and her husband by contrast convert him into a means towards economic growth that reaches towards a future for the family that St. Peter refuses to inhabit. For the Marselluses, Tom's legacy should be translated into corporate success and profits from the patent Tom willed to Rosamond after their betrothal and Tom's death in World War I. When Kathleen says that "our Tom is much nicer than theirs," she compares their sentimental memory to her elder sister's more utilitarian relationship to Tom. In the contrast, Kathleen positions Tom's essence in opposition the way the Marselluses have turned his legacy into a profitable mechanism by converting the patents Tom held from his studies into a product for sale. Two divergent views of Tom's memory are at stake here: one contributes to the Marselluses' futurity, familial stability, and to the national economy.

The other lingers on ephemeral affects and memories, reaching to a lost past that seems irrelevant to the forward reach of the Marselluses' commercialism. In contrast to the Marselluses' utilitarian vision of Tom's legacy, Kathleen and St. Peter prefer to think of him as outside of present-day frames of belonging.

Tom's legacy lingers in Kathleen and St. Peter quite differently, however. After Kathleen leaves her father alone to his memories, Cather provides a clue as to how differently Tom's memory impacts him when readers see St. Peter from Kathleen's focalization. When Kathleen looks back to see her father deep in thought as if "trying to fasten on some fugitive idea," Cather frames Tom and his memory alike as something ephemeral, apart, and impossible to locate (113). But to be fugitive has other connotations as well: it marks Tom outside of national progress by rejecting the way that the Marselluses focus on the profitability of his inventions over sentimental recollections. To be fugitive for Kathleen and St. Peter is to avoid making Tom a product or a regulated thing, to retain his abstract qualities where the Marcelluses remember him for his commercial benefits.

Fugitiveness evokes another sense of displacement that allows the Professor to see something of himself in Tom, something lost on his children. Feeling fugitive, in fact, provides a surprise connection between Tom and St. Peter through a shared genealogy of non-belonging. Cather describes St. Peter as himself appearing foreign, alien, or outside. When first describing St. Peter, Cather remarks that "though he was born on Lake Michigan, of mixed stock (Candian French on one side, and American on the other), St. Peter was commonly said to look like a Spaniard" with his "long brown face," "tawny skin" and black hair" (4,5). These descriptions are later modified to emphasize St. Peter's genealogy through his "Kanuk grandfather," which places St. Peter genealogically even further to the outside, despite his birth in Michigan. (20). The sense

of being an outsider resonates for St. Peter and Tom in ways that remain largely unavailable to his children, implying an awareness of state liminality that accumulates a kind of queer difference to being somehow less American.

In addition to this genealogical lineage outside of America's boundaries, St. Peter's fugitive feelings imply his resistance to normative interpolation: he wishes to retain the queer affects that do not congeal into capitalist production, genetic reproduction, or even durable monogamous relationships.[57] For Tom to be a "fugitive idea" separates his queer attachments and the queer feelings he evoked in St. Peter more from Kathleen's sentiment. In this light, Tom is central to the entire structure of *The Professor's House* not only because his death provides the opportunity for their shared reflection, but because of the melancholic feeling-state that he has left all of the novel's characters. The shared melancholy is not equally shared, however: Tom's death shapes St. Peter especially by separating him from his wife as well as the marital lives of his daughters. Jonathan Goldberg notes that since both Kathleen and Rosamond have some sort of desirous contact with Tom, that they "shape[] themselves through Tom's stories" and that "their desires were formed through same-sex" feeling of St. Peter's attraction to Tom, leaving sexuality throughout the novel "inflected" by same-sex contact.[58] That same-sex attachment, however, is dutifully left in the realm of a difficult to pinpoint affect that the family members can't quite distinguish in their father. After all, when Kathleen describes her father's attachment to Tom as a fugitive idea only after she leaves her father alone to ruminate on the past, she leaves her father to his private space and private feelings of queer relationality. Positioning Tom as a

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[57] What differentiates St. Peter's sense of ethnic difference from Marsellus' in this instance is his queer attachment to Tom; Marsellus, though marked by as Jewish, seems to erase his ethnic heritage by investing wholesale in reproductive futurity and by contributing to the narratives of national economic growth that the St. Peter rejects.

[58] Goldberg, "Strange Brothers," 326.

fugitive idea *for her father* acknowledges, in a sense, that Kathleen herself does not have access to the particular network of associations that Tom evokes for St. Peter.

Viewing same-sex desire as the novel's basic thread shifts the shared "romantic dream" of "finding Roddy" that Kathleen and St. Peter share such that it seems to originate from St. Peter himself—the dream for Kathleen is but an echo of St. Peter's own lingering desire for Tom (112). The dream is remarkably sentimental and arises when Kathleen finds that St. Peter had kept Tom's Mexican blankets—a material reminder of the man he had lost. When St. Peter declares that "nothing could part me from that blanket" he reinforces a connection to Tom whose material connection in both the blankets and Tom's manuscript remain in St. Peter's hands alone (100). These materials carry a history of queer contact: Kathleen reminds St. Peter that the blankets themselves reach back to Tom's unique connection with Roddy when Roddy cared for an ailing Tom. When St. Peter says that he often imagined that he ought "to go out and look for Blake myself," the blankets synechdochally reflect Tom's loss of Blake (112). Though Kathleen and St. Peter both imagine rebuilding the kinship whose loss brought Tom to them in the first place, the attachments are ultimately unequal: Kathleen's is an idle dream that separates her from her sister, while St. Peter repeats the very structure of feeling for Tom that Tom felt for Roddy and documented in his notebooks. When Kathleen recognizes that feeling as a fugitive one, she observes the different impact memories of Tom have for her father. But the material connection that the blanket affords to the past recovers for St. Peter a sensuous affect genealogy unavailable to anyone else. In the end, the memories the blanket evokes reminds St. Peter of the possible connection both he and Blake share with Tom—a queer kinship that his family would not understand or experience.

Remembering him in this way situates at least a part of St. Peter's fascination with Tom in his ability to escape the structures of belonging that St. Peter himself seems fatigued with negotiating. When St. Peter wonders in the novel's finale what Tom's life would be like had he survived the war while his family is away in France, St. Peter concludes that it couldn't have ended normatively.

> [St. Peter] couldn't see Tom building 'Outland' [St. Peter's retirement estate], or becoming a public-spirited citizen of Hamilton. What change would have come in his blue eye, in his fine long hand with the backspringing thumb, which had never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas? A hand like that, had he lived, must have been put to other uses. (246)

All of these place Tom somehow outside of the capacity of the "public spirited citizen," outside of the capacity of homeownership, and outside of the idea of normative marriage. More importantly, where Kathleen thinks about Tom as an idea, the Professor thinks about Tom's body, especially the details of his hands, and how special that body was. St. Peter's eroticized memory describes a decidedly non-normative life that rebukes his own. Even St. Peter's refusal to move into the estate named "Outland" after Tom marks a resistance to normativity in the refusal to excise Tom from the St. Peters' family life. As the normative life of the St. Peter family lives, St. Peter posits that Tom "would have escaped all that. He would have made something new in the world—and the rewards, the meaningless conventional gestures, he would have left to others" (237). St. Peter's self-rebuke of his own normativity shares a space with his refusal to move into his new house, to the consternation of his wife, Lillian, and with his lingering over Tom's notebooks and his own ideas for his project *The Spanish Adventures*, and his fetishizing of the southwest as a space apart. To think through Tom, it seems, allows St. Peter

to imagine a life outside of his responsibilities and outside the domestic space of his marriage. It allows him to imagine a queer future that never arrives in fact.

Institutional Outsiders and the Limits of Queer Life

By remembering Tom in this way, St. Peter imagines them both as sharing an attachment to history and as experiencing displacement from full civic membership in the institutions that they labor for—for Tom, the Smithsonian, and for St. Peter, the college of his employment. Lingering on Tom's life, St. Peter realizes the limits of his profession after the loss of his most beloved interlocutor more acutely. Where the memory of Tom's intimacy undermines his marital relationship, the memory of Tom's intellect causes St. Peter to feel irrelevant to the institutions that have governed his life. In this way, St. Peter seems to relive Tom's disappointment in his failed endeavor to have the Smithsonian recognize his archeological find. Though St. Peter's feelings of institutional marginalization, predate Tom's arrival, his longstanding frustration with his college serves as a point of connection to Tom: his attraction emanates from their mutual outsider status, a repetition of the unspoken feeling of being "something different" from the others that tied Tom to Roddy Blake (112). Compared to heterosexual or capitalist generativity, St Peter describes his relationship with Outland as a "romance … of the mind" that had "brought him a kind of second youth" (234). Living vicariously through Outland's studies, St. Peter takes a reflective pleasure in the ways in which "the boy's mind had the superabundance of heat which is always present when there is rich germination" (234). Much as Tom finds generative agency in his study of the Anasazi, St. Peter experiences a germinating and life-giving potential in the intellectual contact with Tom. Even after Tom's death, these feelings provide St. Peter meaning in a way that is not possible within normative institutional frames like marriage or economic

productivity. These shared experiences prompt a lamentation in St. Peter over his lost capacity to reproduce in the intellectual realm as he did with Tom, which reconfigures the genetic reproduction represented by his family a source of frustration and limitation. The queerness of Tom and St. Peter's relationship, as much as it is erotic, stems from their disinterest in progressive ideologies of commodity exchange, national growth, familial stability, and other structures that might orient them as contributing members of the nation. The two instead share something apart, something that does not contribute to the progressive state in a material, codified manner.

Where Tom feels outside of normative kinship and outside of the nation on the mesa, however, St. Peter is imbricated in national systems, including marriage and the structures of the state university, leaving him feeling adrift and melancholic. By contrasts, Tom's melancholy stems from his loss of the fantasy of a life with Blake. Where Tom's loss of Blake allows him to "see the mesa as a whole" in a moment of almost religious revelation, St. Peter seems trapped in institutional frames as much as in a marriage empty of meaning, intimacy, and eroticism (226). In Tom's case, the loss of Roddy generates a "happiness" he "can't explain" and a "summer, high and blue, a life in itself" in part because he could "forget about Blake without knowing it"; to lose Blake liberates Tom from the very fraternity that caused him both pleasure and pain, leaving him only with himself. By contrast, St. Peter seems trapped at once in his marriage and institutional life, and at once the sadness of his loss of Tom that lives on in the memory of an unrealized potential relationship made impossible by Tom's death.

Two frames constrict the Professor and speak to the damage he feels in institutional norms, a damage that Tom, in the sparseness and isolation of the mesa, has escaped. First, St. Peter feels trapped in his "intolerant" relationship with Lillian (24); second, he feels he has no

place in a state institution that is “vulgarizing education” (120). For Florence Dore, Cather’s dislike of the vulgar and the commercial represent a “reticent aesthetic that produces this valorization of the homosexual male” as outside of consumerism.[59] But Cather operates more slyly, not by valorizing this aesthetic choice so much as lamenting the discourses of progress that leave him and his sexuality on the outside. As one of the few remaining faculty who still practices “cultural studies” and who were “doing work of an uncommercial nature,” St. Peters feels adrift in a university whose modernization privileges utility over idea (120).

Instead, St. Peter turns towards his *Spanish History of North America* and to Tom Outland’s narrative, both of which resist the utilitarian urge of the university regents to “give the taxpayers what they want” (121). These trends mirror Louie Marsellus’ commercialization of Tom’s research. Rather than conforming to the commercial university, St. Peter embraces his exclusion, much as Tom embraced his privacy on the mesa following his rejection in Washington. The two mutually identified through their refusals that there is a possible world, unrealized in their present, in which they could share pleasure in their mutual intellectual endeavors. Rather than finding productivity in women or money, which represent institutionally recognized forms of civic contribution, St. Peter turns to the knowledge production he and Outland shared, which “had made something new in the world” and allowed him to leave “the rewards [of] the meaningless conventional gestures . . . to others” (237). This desire for a future outside of pain anticipates José Esteban Muñoz’s discussion of a utopian queerness that is made possible by refusing violent systems of social categorization.[60] Even in this instance, the queer

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[59] Florence Dore, *The Novel and the Obscene: Sexual Subjects in American Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 43.

[60] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

friendship and production of knowledge that stabilize Outland and St. Peter's respective non-reproductive queerness does not register within the forms of social life through which the polity more generally evaluates civic presences. Where Louie and Rosamond Marsellus revel in a world of conspicuous consumption, St. Peter seeks intellectual products that are valuable not for their monetization but for how they can be shared affectively. In the end, however, institutional exclusion structures both Tom and St. Peter's understanding of intimacy, domesticity, and friendship. Exclusion grounds their queer affiliation and yet also places them literally at the margins of social recognition in ways that cause them a shared type of pain and loss, even while they imagine something unique for themselves in what they refuse.

The modes by which St. Peter imagines an affect genealogy with Tom ultimately suggest his removal from the citizen body more generally: they distinguish him from the "public-spirited citizen," emphasizing a separation from legal and social structures that valorize production and materiality (236). But where Tom ultimately found an agency and liberation in his outsider status, St. Peter perseverates in his failures, prompting a depressive crisis that nearly results in his death. It is here that the Professor's having "managed for years to live two lives, both of them very intense" between his university work and his wife, collapses (19). In an effort to maintain the separation in his two lives, St. Peter purposefully divorces himself from Tom's legacy by refusing a claim to Tom's patents, which are awarded to Rosamond in Tom's will. St. Peter's sense of institutional marginalization, combined with his bifurcated life and his extranational ancestry, mark his outsider status along multiple vectors. To compensate, St. Peter experiences affective forms of attachment that circumvent the institutional and legal frameworks that mark him and Tom as other. St. Peter, in a sense, makes himself a kind of fugitive, eschewing the material world that has consumed his family.

St. Peter's contact with these abstract categories of legally-demarcated belonging (his Canadian ancestry, the civil belonging of his marriage) find an expression later in the book through references to the law itself. For St. Peter, the letter of the law is less important than its affective ties. When St. Peter's closest colleague, Professor Crane, attempts to enlist St. Peter in a legal claim to the patent Tom Outland bequeathed Rosamond, St. Peter makes a strong distinction between the "facts" of patent ownership and the joint intellectual labor between Crane and Tom that allowed his ideas to prosper (126). When Crane claims a relation to Tom's ideas for shepherding their nuance and development, St. Peter concludes that Crane had "been neglectful" and had no right to Tom's intellectual labors or subsequent profits (127). As such, much as St. Peter leads a bifurcated life in his marriage, he distinguishes legal fact from intellectual and emotional attachments such as Crane expresses. Thus, he writes himself and Crane alike outside of a claim to Tom's will, patent, and subsequent profits, in part out of a dislike for the "vulgar success of Outland's idea" in its monetized form (112, 113). Just as Kathleen suggests she and her father have a "much nicer" connection to Tom than the Marselluses monetized version, Cather places Tom's value outside of legally defensible rubrics. Tom's value for St. Peter was in intellectual and emotional contact, not in the patents their joint endeavors produced. Just as Kathleen and St. Peter value the Tom they mutually remember over the legacy Rosamond made commercially valuable, Cather emphasizes affective connections as a source of value in part because those connections are not embroiled in a system of legal categorizations.

St. Peter's interest in the immaterial idea opens a space for queer feelings separate from institutions because of the way thinking about Tom subverts the university, the value of patents, and even the kinship of his marriage in favor of an ephemeral memory. St. Peter's preference for

inhabiting spaces outside of demarcated social structures and expectations leads him to a melancholic feeling. They also mark a social death—his irrelevance within the social structures that organize the lives around him—that culminates in St. Peter's near death in the novel's final pages. After reading letters reporting his family's travels abroad, St. Peter works in his attic office; during a storm, the wind blows out the flame of the gas stove heating the room, and St. Peter nearly asphyxiates on the fumes—a possibility he had long anticipated. The melancholy of the novel culminates in St. Peter trying to "account for the fact that he now wanted to run away from everything he had intensely cared for" even his family (251). Awoken before asphyxiating, St. Peter thinks of the episode as a near suicide and ruminates on the legal meaning of his near death. When wondering "how would such a case [as suicide] be decided under English law? He hadn't lifted his hand against himself—was he required to lift it for himself?," St. Peter frames his own death as a question of indifference to the legal distinction between either proactively saving his life or letting it slip away (252).[61]

The restructuring of St. Peter's relation to his family evokes what Russ Castronovo has called "necro citizenship." According to Castronovo, "U.S. political identity privileges death as a means of deeming trauma, collective memory, racial heritage, and socioeconomic conditions as inconsequential to democratic selfhood," such that death removes the "cultural density" of the individual and replaces it with the "state citizen as an abstract body."[62] St. Peter's near death allows for a transformation by which he can become the sort of political subject that his queer feelings disallowed by allowing those feelings to die—the traumatic death of the longing for

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[61] Stuart Burrows, "Losing the Whole in the Parts: Identity in The Professor's House," *Arizona Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 21–48," 40.

[62] Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth Century United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 8.

Tom, himself gone, realigns St. Peter as a national subject evacuated of his unique affects, longings, and displaced desires. The characteristics of his queer national subjectivity are flattened into a homogeneous citizenship. As Stewart Burrows writes, St. Peter's life is "ordered from the outside at the very moment that he feels as if he is living again the realest *of* his lives," a life which the state categorizes from afar.[63] For Burrows, St. Peter's "vicarious identification with Tom [and] his increasing loss of interest in his own life" relates to his decision to invoke the law—the foundational discourse of the state—to organize a conscience raked by indecision.[64] His near death marks the transformational moment of citizenship's articulation—one predicated on the erasure of St. Peter's unique cultural density. The violence of the novel's ending has everything to do with the rejection of his queer attachments and the return to his family, leaving him transformed but emptied of the content that defined him previously.

Queer Death and the Homogenization of Identification

The last chapter stages St. Peter's near suicide as a direct exponent of the ways in which he no longer fits into the social and legal spaces orient and make sense of his life. Significantly, his near-death, melancholy, and separation from family coincides with the near conclusion of the project to edit Tom Outland's notebooks. In having St. Peter's last intellectual engagement with Tom coincide with his near death, Cather circulates a feeling that the Professor no longer belongs to the spaces, both institutional and domestic, that symbolize social and civic membership. At the level of legally recognized membership, he feels ever more disconnected from his family but

[63] Burrows, "Losing the Whole in the Parts," 40, 41. Placing Burrow's reading in context of Castronovo's conceptualization of necro citizenship emphasizes the violence and the normative whiteness contingent with state invocation and belonging, a violence that Burrows largely misses in his refusal to name queerness as a force in the novel.

[64] Ibid., 40.

also from the house that he will soon move into and to which "he didn't belong" (247). Thinking back on Tom, St. Peter feels a "mental dissipation" as he remembers Tom's first visit to the old home (239). Such reflections lead him to a feeling of "desperation" and that he "could not live with his family again," in a radical turning away from the social order in which he nominally has a clear role. Instead, St. Peter circulates back to a fable about the "dear vistas to the American heart" that had motivated his grandfather to "tramp[] so many miles across Europe into Russia" to the "Canadian wilderness" (246). The international reach of St. Peter's family ties the entire genealogy of its immigrant experience to what, in the novel, has been the queerest and most legally liminal and excluded space: the "long, rugged" spaces of Tom Outland's country, a space that seems outside of the reach of the order of the law.[65] Even as St. Peter's melancholy mounts, he describes moments of exclusion from social and legal recognition in the breakdown of marriages and the recognition of international kinships. Coupled with the Professor's own disinterest in the value of the law and the emphasis on his extranational heritage, being geographically and affectively apart yokes Tom and St. Peter together. The two, ultimately, share an affective life as excluded figures who find kinship in the doubleness of the lives they lead.

The zeroing out of St. Peter's "cultural density" that is necessary to return him to normative life erases these distinguishing characteristics. Much as Michele Abate described the way in which European immigrants were made white by being positioned against sexual others in Cather's fiction, the evacuation of St. Peter's queerness also removes the relevance of his

[65] This context helps to concretize the ways in which Cather's writing contextually interacts with developments in U.S. legislation and legal doctrine surrounding citizenship, especially for Native Americans, who maintained extranational status up until 1924. Numerous laws and court cases between Reconstruction and the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 meant that citizenship for Native Americans was a patchwork affair. The 1884 Supreme Court Case *Elk v. Wilkins* determined that "who has not been naturalized, or taxed, or recognized as a citizen either by the United States or by the state, is not a citizen of the United States," indicating that the legal doctrines securing birthright to all subjects of U.S. jurisdiction were still subject to legal wrangling. See Elk v. Wilkins, 112 U.S. 94 (1884).

heritage more generally: he moves into his new house and is distanced from his past.[66] Peter and Outland alike had previously fantasized about locations that enticed because of their distance from racially homogenous centers of authority. But those fantasies are neutralized, returning St. Peter to his home in Hamilton much as Tom left the mesa to seek an education. The loss of the frontier represents an enfolding within normative whiteness that also necessitates the erasure of their queerness. The invocation of the law in order to understand the consequences of suicidality shows the furthest extreme of the damage that comes from relating to public institutions writ large: the illegalization of queer figures leaves few choices for queer lives other than their complete and total self-effacement. The law, in this sense, becomes an especially violent discourse because of the identifications that it negates. Among these, the desire for queer difference and the attachment to racial and ethnic variation (through the inheritance from the Anasazi and through St. Peter's "kanuk" heritage) animate both St. Peter's and Tom Outland's sense of self. Though Cather describes St. Peter as at last able to feel "the ground under his feet" after his near death, this grounding forces a normativization that evacuates his emotive life (258).

Despite lingering on a past that emphasizes the professor's "kanuk" heritage, that emphasized Tom's lack of birthright, and that celebrated spaces like the mesa for enabling queer feelings because they are at the fringes of the nation's institutions, *The Professor's House* ends with St. Peter's return to nominal social and familial membership. Loss encodes that membership, however. Describing St. Peter's reflection on his near death, Cather writes, "His temporary release from consciousness seemed to have been beneficial. He had let something go—and it was gone: something very precious, that he could not consciously have relinquished probably" (258). Though unnamed, St. Peter can only have lost a nostalgic past of shared time

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[66] Abate, *Tomboys*, 100.

with Tom Outland that can no longer endure in the present. The fact that "he doubted whether his family would ever realize that he was not the same man they had said goodbye to" amplifies the sense that the deepest melancholy he feels originates from the loss of the queerness that his family never recognized (258). When describing how St. Peter "thought he knew where he was, and that he could face with fortitude …. The future," Cather implies that the most radical experience of St. Peter's near suicide was a forced normalization and conformity to the institutions and structures from which he wished to escape (258). To transform St. Peter from his backwards orientation to a coerced attachment to the future marks the violence of his normalization, and the loss of the attachment to the past that this normalization entails. As the last word of the novel, "future" implies a certain cruelty. That future is only possible through the death of St. Peter's queerness and his reemergence as a normalized, necrotic citizen.

What is harder to distinguish here is the political critique of Cather's suggestion that the normalization of queerness equates social death. The overall melancholy of the novel's conclusion could lament the developments by which the state recognized queers as a discrete identity category and developed a regime for policing such undesired deviance. In this light, the novel's slippery attitude towards identification is one of Cather's most important strategies: her novel laments the categories of sexual nonbelonging that were coming into being because the codification of marginal identities threatened the kinds of fraternity and affective connection that had previously circulated under an at least less visibly violent state regime. She laments that St. Peter might have to identify at all, that he is torn between a past in which identifications did not signify meaningfully and a present in which Tom Outland's legacy is not intellect, ideal, or feelings of attachment, but the needs of national capitalism. In the end, Tom Outland is made a part of the nation's progressive infrastructure despite the queer origins of his project; only St.

Peter really remembers those queer origins, and even then, the queerness he shared with Tom also dissipates in favor of marital stability. Though imagining the Professor's resistance to identification to his pre-suicide desire to return to the "untamed vistas" of "Outland country" and its distance from hegemonic U.S. culture, Cather retracts St. Peter's vision (246). Instead, he nearly expires in his house and replaces his former dwelling with the "Outland" estate, a poor replica of the landscape and the person who situate his identification and desire.

The tragedy of Cather's novel is in the way that both Tom and the Professor fail to escape the limited strictures of early twentieth century identification in which Cather seems to imagine they have no place. By the end of the novel, the only mode by which to secure belonging is in adopting normative socialities, which equates social death for queer figures. Much as Cather inserts and erases Claude Wheeler's queerness by virtue of his patriotism in *One of Ours*, here Tom dies in war and St. Peter's near suicide implies the erasure of the man that his family thought they knew (258).[67] The fact that St. Peter believes his family will not notice that "he was not the same man they had said goodbye to" amplifies a melancholy in the loss of a queer self that was barely legible or identified. Instead, in assimilating to normative life, St. Peter feels "without joy, but without passionate griefs" (257). His life becomes a blank, homogeneous space, much like the lives in Washington that horrify Tom. In the end, St. Peter abandons the memory of Tom and the fantasy of life in the southwest without his family. The death of St. Peter's past ushers his movement into a future in which the affects and attachments he cherished, of Tom, of the southwest, of an unidentified queer fraternity all disappear. That these attachments largely circulated around figurations of racial difference, which themselves invoked

[67] For Marilee Lindeman, Claude Wheeler's normalization as a soldier exemplifies the way that Cather inserts queer figures into normative roles. Normativity in this case erases the queerness that Tom wishes to institutionalize and that the Professor won't acknowledge. Marilee Lindeman, *Willa Cather: Queering America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 71.

legal exclusion or liminal citizenship, only amplifies the violence of the regimes that policed normativity as a homogeneous, white, and heterosexual standard. Ultimately, Cather traces developments in the law through which the citizenship of queer figures, foreigners, and people of color were excluded, in this case the Anasazi and the Kanuck through which Tom and St. Peter articulate their genealogical separation. As such, Cather's figurations examine the dangers of associating with difference and degeneracy in both queer and racialized modes. Cather's solution appears to be to bury queer degeneracy under a sanitized bourgeois whiteness protected from proximity to other marginalized or racialized identities. The tragedy of the novel is that Cather's strategy ultimately equates the queer feelings that had been at a vitalizing force in her artistic vision with death.

Chapter 5

Expatriate Longings: Finding Queerness Elsewhere in Nella Larsen's Quicksand *and* Passing

Aliens are we in our native land. [1]
—Frederick Douglass

One three centuries removed
From the scenes his father loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me? [2]
—Countee Cullen, "Heritage"

A close intimacy between two of the same sex was more than likely to end disastrously for one or the other. But Sappho Clark seemed to fill a long-felt want in her life, and she had from the first a perfect trust in the beautiful girl. [3]
—Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces*

In a 1925 essay "On being Young—A Woman—And Colored," Marita Bonner describes a perennial problem in the social and artistic position of black women: isolation and marginalization. Writing that the world especially "stifles and chokes. . . hedging in, pressing down on eyes, ears and throat" of the black woman artist, Bonner called upon her female peers in the Harlem Renaissance not only to acknowledge the structural limits on their creative practice, but to imagine solutions beyond those structures.[4] The peripherality and danger she describes,

[1] Frederick Douglass, "The Man Who Is Right Is a Majority," in *Frederik Douglass: The Colored Orator*, ed. Frederic May Holland (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1969), 216.

[2] Qtd. in Nella Larsen, *Passing: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, A Norton Critical Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2007), 167.

[3] Pauline E Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 98.

[4] Qtd. in Cheryl Wall, *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 4.

however, was especially pronounced for the queer women of the movement. Though Henry Louis Gates Jr. famously observed that the Harlem Renaissance was "as gay as it was black," the queerness that structured one of the most transformative periods of black literary production appears predominantly male in most critical genealogies.[5] The lacuna surrounding the queer women of the Renaissance has, to be sure, not been unnoted: though Cheryl Schwarz acknowledges the vitality that lesbian figures brought to the Renaissance, she also claims that a "joint study" of male and female queer figures would be "beyond the scope" of a project focused on the "dissidence" of the Harlem Renaissance's queers.[6] Schwarz' focus on the dissidence of major male figures—from Countee Cullen and Richard Bruce Nugent to Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay—not only leaves queer female contributors like Angelina Weld Grimké and Nella Larsen at the margins; it reinforces the perception that their writing performed less vital work in situating black and queer politics in the early twentieth century. From this vantage, gendered difference in the Renaissance's queer culture bifurcates not only the kinds of queers that visibly represent the literary innovation in the movement, but also masks the possibility, visibility, and expression of dissent by its queer women.

The gap in recognizing queer black women as a source of dissent in the Renaissance is surprising. As one of its members, Nella Larsen not only took up Bonner's call to reimagine the position of black women, she did so by documenting explicitly political themes in her novels

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[5] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "The Black Man's Burden." *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Ed. Michael Warner (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 230–238, 231; See for counter example Emily J. Orlando, "'Feminine Calibans' and 'Dark Madonnas of the Grave': The Imaging of Black Women in the New Negro Renaissance," in *New Voices on the Harlem Renaissance: Essays on Race, Gender, and Literary Discourse*, ed. Australia Tarver and Paula C. Barnes (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), 59–95.

[6] A. B. Crista Schwarz, *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 3.

Quicksand and *Passing*: the marginalization of women, the limits of bourgeois black politics, and, the danger and allure of queer attachment. In the critical consensus, Larsen approaches two separate forms of politics for black women in her novels: *Quicksand* (1928) addresses the implications of international racial and gender alienation, where *Passing* (1929) documents the unique threats of expressing queer desire between women.[7] The problems and themes of the two novels are more tightly intertwined, however, than critics have assessed. In fact, each novel uses a surface-level thematic to represent a related, inverse problem—international alienation in *Quicksand* provides a pretext for exploring queer feelings, and queerness in *Passing* becomes evident through the foreign and the alien. The connections between the two expose the gender essentialism of the Renaissance's queer utopias by taking up the inverted aspects of the same themes and showing their limits.

To address the outsider status of black queer women during the Harlem Renaissance, Larsen questions what it means to establish modes and motifs of belonging in the context of overwhelmingly masculine spaces through which queer men resisted state interpolation. In this sense, she builds from a feature made possible by the Renaissance itself: its reach across the globe to other forms of community across the Black Atlantic. As Shane Vogel observes, the

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[7] Starting with Judith Butler's address of the queer subtext of *Passing*, critical attention to the two novels has largely addressed queerness in *Passing* alone, where with *Quicksand* critics focus on race, gender, and national affiliation. For *Passing* see Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter.* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Jordan Landry, "Black Women Anew Through Lesbian Desire in Nella Larsen's Passing" *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 60, no. 1 (2006) 23-52; David L. Blackmore, "'That Unreasonable Restless Feeling': The Homosexual Subtexts of Nella Larsen's Passing" *The African American Review* 26, no. 3 (1992) 475-484. Assessments of *Quicksand* focus more on the novel's racial, geographic, and textual politics. See for example_Anna Brickhouse, "Nella Larsen and the Intertextual Geography of Quicksand," *African American Review* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 533–60; Ann E. Hostetler, "The Aesthetics of Race and Gender in Nella Larsen's Quicksand," *PMLA* 105, no. 1 (1990): 35–46, Ann Rayson, "Foreign Exotic of Domestic Drudge? The African American Woman in Quicksand and Tar Baby," *MELUS* 23, no. 2 (1998): 87–100, Debra B. Silverman, "Nella Larsen's Quicksand: Untangling the Webs of Exoticism," *African American Review* 27, no. 4 (1993): 599–614.

queer spaces of the Renaissance explicitly rejected assimilationist politics by vacating citizenship as an effective mode for adjudicating identity. Where many major figures of the Harlem Renaissance, from W. E. B. Du Bois, to Alain Lock, among others, "were fighting for full participation in American citizenship, many black queer writers and performers . . . were challenging the sexual and class normativity on which citizenship was based."[8] Citing Langston Hughes as an example of the fight against heterosexuality and nationality as primary frameworks for civic identification, Vogel argues that queer expression during the Renaissance specifically imagined spaces outside of heterosexual citizenship as a mode of resistance. Indeed, as Rinaldo Walcott describes, "Black diaspora queers live in a borderless, large world of shared identification and imagined historical relations produced through a range of fluid cultural artifacts" from film to clothing to sex.[9] Their liberation was in stepping outside of the state and building community and context through ephemera.

And yet, the way the Renaissance approached this politics of dissent through queer and international tropes appears reserved primarily for men.[10] Even though famously international figures like Bessie Smith and Josephine Baker attest that women provided an important role in registering a diasporic community artistically, attention to the queer dimension of their contributions remains minimal. As Samantha Pinto suggests, the Renaissance tended to circulate

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[8] Shane Vogel, "Closing Time: Langston Hughes and the Poetics of Harlem Nightlife" *Criticism* 48:3 (2006): 397-425, 414.

[9] Rinaldo Walcott, "Outside in Black Studies: Reading from a Queer Place in the Diaspora," in *Queerly Canadian: An Introductory Reader in Sexuality Studies*, ed. Maureen Fitzgerald and Scott Rayter (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2012), 23–34, 25.

[10] McKay's *Banjo* exhibits the gendered limits of utopian diaspora, which, as Anthony Reed notes is "more ambiguous" than the radical politics offered by the novel's men. Anthony Reed, "'A Woman Is a Conjunction': The Ends of Improvisation in Claude McKay's *Banjo: A Story without a Plot*," *Callaloo* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 758–72, 760.

“a feminism that is in fact embedded in a set of practices not realized as intellectual work”—as emblematized by the treatment of Smith and Baker.[11] The gap impacts the way that diaspora, international cosmopolitanism, and black queerness imagine the politics of extra-national belonging. If the queer women of the Renaissance are not seen as contributors to diaspora’s utopian project, what becomes of its liberating possibilities?

Larsen’s novels posit that the prospects of liberation were deeply limited—a suggestion that begins with her insistence that the liberation of queer feeling and liberation in extranational communities did not provide an affirmative image for queer black women. Instead, Larsen focuses on the many impacts of feeling alien in any of the venues and realms that imagined community and liberation outside of nationalism. In *Quicksand*, Helga Crane, the half-Danish, half African American protagonist, feels displaced in any context of her kinship. The term of Helga’s difference registers her national and racial identity as a question of displacement: she feels without a home in America and impossibly distant on account of her “alien appearance” in Copenhagen, her mother’s home city (63, 103). These feelings cause Helga to desire an escape from her African American heritage; in a kind of inverse of diasporic belonging, she attempts to find a home with her white kin in Denmark, in the process subtly critiquing diaspora’s promise to ground her sense of self and sense of race. These feelings of racial distance circulate on the novel’s surface, but beneath them Helga Crane’s migratory quest for racial and national identification depends on the presence and loss of an intimacy with women that borders on the erotic.

The queer desire of *Quicksand*’s transatlantic quest finds its inverse in Nella Larsen’s subsequent novel, *Passing*. Building on *Quicksand, Passing* charts both racial and sexual themes

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[11] Samantha Pinto, *Difficult Diasporas: The Transnational Feminist Aesthetic of the Black Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 23.

through the destructive intimacy between Irene, a politically active member of the black bourgeoisie in Harlem, and Clare Kendry, who passes as white and has concealed her heritage from her violently racist white husband. Through the novel, Irene remains drawn to "something exotic" in her childhood friend, Clare, who the novel describes from its first page as seeming "out of place and alien" (191, 171). Yet, Irene finds it impossible to imagine escaping the bourgeois life she and her husband enjoy. Ultimately, she rejects both Clare's attachments to Europe through Clare's husband, as well as her own husband's perennial desire to escape America for the racially and sexually liberated environment of Brazil. Both removals, one laterally to the Old World, one to the global south, position liberation from the confines of U.S. citizenship as a movement elsewhere; both prospects ultimately fail.[12] In one novel, a plot of intra- and international migration conceals queer sexual desire; in the other, queer feelings attempt to find expression even with the fear that expression is only possible outside of the U.S. In both, queer feelings and national ideology compete for domination of Larsen's characters social and sexual lives. Viewing the novels in these terms uncovers Nella Larsen's critique of the visibility queer women had within an artistic movement that otherwise imagined a utopian world beyond U.S. racial and sexual regimes.[13] For Larsen, the situation for women is one of conflict, of competing ties to race or sex that seem impossible to resolve.

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[12] The movement North-South and transatlantically described here disrupts Robert Stepto's thesis that vertical migration patterns dominate twentieth century African American narrative form. See Robert Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991). See also David Krasner's "Migration, Fragmentation, and Identity: Zora Neale Hurston's "Color Struck" and the Geography of the Harlem Renaissance" *Theatre Journal* 54:4 (2001): 533-550.

[13] Productive work has been done by Jafari S. Allen, Reynaldo Walcott, and others to rediscover community across the rupture of the Atlantic, specifically in queer movement. José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) has done much to blend these forms of tenuous community discovery with the language of utopian thinking. Following Muñoz, Nadia Ellis's *Territories of the Soul* provides perhaps the most provocative account of the promise of queerness in the

When paired, Larsen's novels act as a kind of diptych: they illustrate that racial alienation and queer exclusion share a logic specifically in the rhetoric of what is alien and natural to the nation. In the early twentieth century, the threat of being alien—of being outside the boundaries of the nation and the civic body—conjures this dual suggestion of being inimical to national citizenship on account of sexual and racial difference alike. Larsen's novels chart this slippage between race and sexual difference in U.S. regimes of legal exclusion with unusual deftness. During a period when terms like "alienism" suggested both the possibility of being nationally separate and medically categorized as sexually deviant, she documented their intersection and the political stakes of their deployment. Against that backdrop, she challenged the limits these rubrics of exclusion placed on racial and sexual subjectivity in a form of political dissent that rejected the terminology and the structures that marginalized black people and pathologized queer difference.[14] As Larsen's novels show, any project aiming to represent black life in the U.S. requires an engagement with the rhetoric that conflated race and sexual expression alike as threats to the neutrality of white, heterosexual citizenship. In this context, Larsen unpacks how intersecting regimes of otherness and national exclusion impacted the black queer imaginary—and how women especially sat at that imaginary's margins. For Larsen, true political

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black diaspora; this too is largely male, however, and also focuses on the middle of the twentieth century. The difference I'm drawing out here is that utopian discovery was not imagined for black queer women in the ways it has for Nugent and McKay especially.

[14] For example, Yu-Fang Cho observes how changes in sexual culture prompted the "legal codification of white heterosexuality in the United States in response to the crisis of marriage, immigration, and expansion" that intensified after 1900. Yu-Fang Cho, *Uncoupling American Empire: Cultural Politics of Deviance and Unequal Difference 1890-1910* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

representation meant addressing these forms of marginalization in order to understand their shared logic—and to understand how that logic uniquely affected black women.[15]

To be sure, the queer diasporic projects proposed by McKay and Nugent depend on rejecting national citizenship as a productive mode of recognition, and finding community in international circulation, sexual expression, and migration.[16] Nugent's short story "Smoke Lillies and Jade," for example, depicts the contact between a narrator, Alex, and a Spanish-speaking lover he cruises in the streets of New York. When the two couple, Nugent describes a speechless contact that transmutes the intimacy of a shared language into bodily communication: "long they lay . . . blowing smoke and exchanging thoughts . . . and Alex swallowed with difficulty . . . he felt a glow of tremor ... and they talked and ... slept." In "Smoke Lilies and Jade," queer attachment becomes possible because of the level of linguistic separation (suggesting a European or Latin American extension in Beauty's Spanish) and the possibilities for liberation that emerge from their erotic, nonverbal contact. The international implications of such a queerness were

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[15] Before Larsen, Pauline Hopkins registers how civic belonging begins to incorporate sexuality as a marker of exclusion in her novel *Contending Forces*. Hopkins writes that the threat of losing the franchise shows how easy these citizens could be made "alien in the land of one's birth," (125). By the time we arrive at Hopkins, however, to be "alien" means more than just being without a home or country, as Hopkins addresses most acutely through the character Sappho. Sappho later observes the ways in which gender and sexuality raised similar concerns about the unstable place that marginal subjects maintain within the citizen body. When Sappho longs for "girl friendships," she avers that "intimacy between two of the same sex" will "end in disaster," indicating a risk inherent in the expression, though not the desire, for prohibited attachments. The disaster, Hopkins indicates a few pages later, stems from the way same sex relations disrupt the domestic space that should be the refuge of "private citizens." Through Sappho, Hopkins makes non-normative sexuality a mode of exclusion that functions alongside the citizen/alien binary. See *Contending Forces*, 97-98.

[16] For work on Nugent and McKay's queer possibility, see for example: Simon Dickel, *Black/Gay: The Harlem Renaissance, The Protest Era, and Constructions of Black Gay Identity in the 1980s and 90s* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011); Charles Michael Smith, "Bruce Nugent: Bohemian of the Harlem Renaissance," in *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*, ed. Joseph Beam (Boston: Alyson, 1986), 209–20; Gary Edward Holcomb, "The Sun Also Rises in Queer Black Harlem: Hemingway and McKay's Modernist Intertext," *Journal of Modern Literature* 30, no. 4 (July 1, 2007): 61–81; and, Eric H. Newman, "Ephemeral Utopias: Queer Cruising, Literary Form, and Diasporic Imagination in Claude McKay's Home to Harlem and Banjo," *Callaloo* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 167–85.

taken up additionally by the Jamaican-born McKay, whose *Banjo* depicts a longstanding intimacy between Ray and his comrade, Banjo. Their intimacy represents what Laura Doyle has called a "provocative . . . sexual crisis"[17] made possible by what McKay calls the "barbarous international romance" of Marseille's international and diasporic communities.[18] The polymorphism of multi-national cultural contact provides cover for transgressive sexualities that broke the vision of a black middle class that the Renaissance challenged.[19] The possibility of the black queer figure, in these depictions, emerges from a reach beyond the limits of a single national or social method of control.

Where Hughes, Nugent, and McKay, among others, find sites of resistance in the cabarets, clubs, and bawdy spaces that tend to privilege male encounters, Larsen explores autonomous, often private, female spaces that do not register within the largely male, international, and diasporic order her peers describe. For Larsen's novels, queer feelings occur in private, and as such, they do not engage with the kind of communal imaginary of her peers. Larsen divests from the belief that public spaces, either within the liberal rubric of rights-bearing subjects or in the bawdy sexuality of a queer diasporic commons, can provide release. In this sense, both *Quicksand* and *Passing* explore the negative dimension of her peers' diasporic and international field: she shows how the exclusion of black queer women from that mode of community formation amplifies negative affects, leaving little option but for her queer figures to

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[17] Laura Doyle, "Transnational History at Our Backs: A Long View of Larsen, Woolf, and Queer Racial Subjectivity in Atlantic Modernism" *Modernism/modernity* 13, no. 3 (531-559), 545.

[18] Claude McKay, *Banjo*: *A Story without a Plot* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1957), 68.

[19] Multiplicity and hybridity, as Caroline Goeser observes, had political implications as well: these dynamic figurations pushed back against the homogenized representation of black subjects, celebrating multiple formations that each deserved a political place. See Goeser's "The Case of Ebony and Topaz: Racial and Sexual Hybridity in Harlem Renaissance Illustrations," *American Periodicals* 15, no.1 (2005) 86-111.

succumb to normative modes of social being for black women. She draws a space separate from diaspora to explore, engaging instead in an explicit politics of queer resistance to patriarchal statehood that finds power in privatized, non-state feminine spaces and motifs. In so doing, Larsen's voice emerges as a counter point, a voice advocating neither for state inclusion or for the consolidation of a public queer political identity. [20] For Larsen, to be free from both the U.S. history of sexism and racism and from the limitations of identification categories means to step outside of publically performed social strictures, to imagine a world beyond the limitations of identity itself. After all, the identities available afforded no place for Larsen nor the complex feelings of similar queer women. Instead, her novels advance possibility of disaffiliation: a politics that imagines escape from the local confines and strictures of Harlem or even of the burgeoning set of U.S. definitions and regulations that restricted queerness.

As this chapter demonstrates, the privileging of international queerness as a male enterprise erases the ways in which queer women have considered the political limits of civic identification and the rights-based discourses that have treated black queer women with especial violence and dismissal. I approach the problem by first addressing how Larsen stages the possibility of queer desire between women through the feeling national political exclusion and irrelevance. In *Passing,* I show how queerness responds to the challenges of expression within a national climate already threatening because of its racism. Building political capital for queers in the context of more visible race regimes, subsequently, appears an impossibility. Next, I address how the transatlantic wandering of Helga Crane in *Quicksand* indexes the failure of queer desire

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[20] Addressing this lacuna in a contemporary frame, Jafari S. Allen posits that a fully functional black/queer/diasporic endeavor should be founded on black queer feminism's "synthetic vision" that can "call into being futures in which black subjects exist and thrive." See Allen "Introduction: Black/Queer/Diaspora at the Current Conjuncture," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, no. 2–3 (2012): 211–48, 223.

to liberate Helga from a patriarchy that does not value women as independent thinkers. Together, the novels evince the way that David Eng describes "queer diasporas" as "call[ing] attention to unauthorized subjects and to unacknowledged structures of feeling beyond an empirical tradition of liberal rights and representation."[21] I bend this argument to look at what Larsen's inhabitation of competing political positionalities (within or outside the nation, heterosexual or queer, black or white) have to say about the prospects of political engagement more broadly. Larsen's question—to which she may not present a positive answer—concerns where the alienation of queer of color subjectivity intersects with broader questions about the limits of liberal politics, commonly aligned with the progressive thesis of an egalitarian citizenship. She moves between these poles: on one hand, she finds possibility of solidarity in the alienation experienced by the diasporic subject whose idea of a hybrid home is not yet realized. And yet, Larsen remains tied to the U.S. liberal politics of citizenship, since her characters cannot execute the expatriation they seem to desire. In the world portrayed by *Quicksand* and *Passing* together, Larsen explores the limits of citizen belonging and her emphasizes stateless alienation for queer subject for whom even expatriation solve entrenched histories of oppression. Where the Renaissance fashioned itself by reaching beyond the limitations of American belonging, Larsen showed how queer women were afforded no commensurate liberation—they remained something impossible, with a freedom yet to be discovered.

1. Passing's Global Imaginary

To have queer feelings in *Passing* is to express and recognize the peculiar form of alienation described by being both sexually deviant and racially other. Larsen raises this

[21] David Eng, *Feelings of Kinship*: *Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: North Carolina, 2010),15.

intersection from the beginning of the novel: when Clare Kendry writes Irene Redfield's after a long gap in their acquaintance, Irene reflects on their seemingly vast differences by describing how the "thin Italian paper with its almost illegible scrawl seem[ing] out of place and alien" (171). Clare's letter resurfaces charged memories for Irene: it evokes an encounter in their hometown of Chicago a few years before the primary diegesis of the novel in 1920s Harlem. In Chicago, Clare and Irene share a chance encounter when both seek refuge from the summer heat in a whites-only hotel. That encounter unsettles Irene: for her part, Irene has dedicated her adult life to the upper middle-class politics the black bourgeoisie, to her husband Brian's career, and to her children. By contrast, her childhood friend had long ago crossed into the white world completely, disavowing her black heritage and her friends from the South Side of Chicago. Though both women could pass as white, each embraced a radically different racial politics. Their separation compounds when Clare exposes Irene to her obscenely racist husband in Chicago, causing the two friends to suffer a seemingly irreconcilable break. Despite her disgust with Clare's politics and her passing as white, however, Irene's feelings for Clare remain conflicted. Well before Irene expresses "resentment and rage" at Clare's renewed contact after their last encounter, she expresses sympathy and desire for the professions of intimacy in Clare's subsequent letter years later. Reveling in the "mysterious and slightly furtive" quality of the letter, Irene feels an overwhelming interest in Clare that slips between an erotic fascination with Clare's transgression of racial boundaries and a dismissive rage at her racial treachery (171). The circuit between these two affects constitutes what Judith Butler has called a "psychoanalytic challenge" in which race and queerness intersect, collide, or conflate as conflicting modes of identification.[22]

[22] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 122.

The framing of Clare's furtive and alien mysteriousness forms a significant and understudied relation between sex and politics in Larsen's queerest novel. By framing Clare in this way, Larsen suggests that Irene finds Clare both an enticement and a threat because Clare subverts the boundaries of U.S. civil society to which Irene has invested her life. For Irene, Clare's outsider status evokes two things: a form of foreignness that is at once enticing because of its difference, and a form of alienness that was commonly used in the rhetoric of the 1920s to imagine foreign threats to U.S. social cohesion. Queerness circulates at the center of the foreignness that Clare evokes for Irene: as numerous reports in the 1910s and early 1920s suggested, loser European social and sexual mores brokered fears of same-sex degeneracy.[23] In this climate, foreignness evoked a sexual climate that threatened the progressive values of marriage, reproduction, and economic contribution that were at the center of the U.S. political imaginary for desirable citizenship.[24] Clare makes that boundary-crossing more dangerous by eroticizing her contact with Irene. Before more overtly sexual expressions of Clare's "wild desire for her "time in Chicago" with Irene, before Clare confesses to having "longed to be with [Irene] again" and her regret at "this pale life" she had chosen, Larsen shapes their strange relationship as the difference between the queer alien and categorized civic subject. Clare's alien and exotic qualities stand outside: for Irene, the promise of that outsider status seems both like a kind of liberation from her bourgeois unhappiness, but also an existential threat to the foundation of Irene's social life. By positioning Clare as a kind of civic threat, Larsen cuts to the heart of what is both desirable and dangerous about her: that Irene's queer feelings for Clare will result in her

[23] For a discussion of these imbricated fears of sexual deviance, see the Senate Commission on Immigration, published 1909. "Brief Statement of the Immigration Commission with conclusions and recommendations and views of the minority" (Serial Set Vol. 5865), 38.

[24] Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2009).

expulsion from the political and social systems to which she had devoted her life. In this context, Clare's danger lies in associating Irene with behavior that threatened national progress upon which bourgeois stability in the U.S. was predicated: the language of good citizenship that since the end of the civil war was represented by the heterosexual couple, the reproductive family, and active participation in the modern economy.

The letter that evokes such powerful memories for Irene inaugurates a break in the novel's narration: remembering an encounter a few years prior in Chicago, the narrative steps back in time to recover Irene's feelings of their first contact since childhood. Readers experience their contact through this narrative rupture, but it is not the only break the novel explores in time and space. From the beginning of the novel, Larsen represents the sexual and political boundaries that Clare ruptures literally by dramatizing the physical territory in which both their sexual and racial encounters are transacted and, more importantly, publicly regulated. She does so by staging the encounter with Clare and the enticement of her foreignness by inhabiting a foreign-seeming place herself: by seeking refuge at a white hotel. When Larsen begins with "what [Irene] remembered" on this hot Chicago day, she describes Irene's own feelings of discomfort with public spaces and desire for private intimacy, an intimacy that she eventually shares with Clare. To begin, Larsen portrays how Irene herself depends on racial ambiguity. When Irene feels "soiled from the contact with so many sweating bodies" as she shops in Chicago's commercial district, she finds herself in "need for immediate safety" and is promptly picked up by a cab, who suggests that she go to the Drayton, a white-only hotel (175). Shortly after, she finds herself on the roof, as if having been "wafted upward on a magic carpet to another world, pleasant, quiet, and strangely remote from that one she had left below" (176). Though Larsen leaves the revelation of Irene's race absent for a few more pages, Larsen frees Irene from

Chicago's crowds and places her in the desirable safety of white bourgeois life. What Irene seems to find enticing about the Drayton is not only its removal from the sweat and heat of Chicago, but of the political security offered by the whiteness in which she is briefly included. Part of what makes Clare's racial disavowal enticing is the way in which her passing breaks apart the boundaries of political membership that are especially important for Irene.

The spatial transgression impacts Clare and Irene's renewed contact by emphasizing the racial boundary they cross. Sexual transgression, too, appears in their contact, however: their meeting is preceded by a reflection on her marital unhappiness, which places Irene's marital discord in conflict with her barely suppressed fascination with Clare. Waiting for tea on the Drayton roof, Irene reflects on her married life, and how her husband is "forever wanting something that he couldn't have" (176). Just before meeting Clare, we find Irene passing as white and disavowing both her husband's firmly held political convictions of the failure of the U.S. project and his subliminal interest in and admiration of the loser sexual climate of Brazil. In the midst of Irene's dual transgressions, one intruding on the space of whiteness, the other ruminating on the failures of her marriage, Clare appears. From the first, Larsen's introduction of Clare is attentive to the point of being erotic. Larsen writes: "An attractive-looking woman, was Irene's opinion, with those dark, almost black eyes, and that wide mouth like a scarlet flower against the ivory of her skin. Nice clothes too, just right for the weather, thin and cool without being mussy, as summer things were so want to be" (177). The literal territory of their contact stages Irene and Clare's mutual desire by allowing their gazes to linger due to the shared secret of their passing. During their mutual trespass, Irene positions the idea of Clare's attractiveness in relation to her being outside of Irene's political framework. At one point describing Clare as being Mexican or Italian and suggesting that such national difference made her exotic, enticing,

and sexually forward, Irene rationalizes her interest in Clare by trying address whether or not she was aware of Irene's trespass. As Judith Butler diagnoses the scene, before "racial crossing and sexual infidelity . . . alternatively entrances Irene and fuels her moral condemnation of Clare with renewed ferocity," Irene is fascinated by Clare's daring.[25] But the scene has broader political implications than Butler intimates. Larsen attaches Irene's fascination with Clare's to the idea of a national inscrutability, recognizing the spatial boundaries that circumscribe racial or sexual identification with a lexicon of foreignness and trespass.

Put another way, location and transgression, as much as race, enables their first erotic attachment. When noting the obsessiveness of Irene's gaze, which lingers on Clare's garments, her skin, her eyes, her mouth, Larsen raises the danger and sexuality of Irene's fascination to the surface—but only when her gaze is interrupted in public. In fact, the erotic attention of Irene's gaze reaches its sexual potential with the introduction the triangulating figure of the waiter, with whom Irene believes Clare is overtly familiar:

> A waiter was taking her order. Irene saw her smile up at him as she murmured something—thanks, maybe. It was an odd sort of smile. Irene couldn't quite define it, but she was sure that she would have classed it, coming from another woman, as being a shade too provocative for a waiter. About this one, however, there was something that made her hesitate to name it that. A certain impression of assurance, perhaps. The waiter came back with the order. Irene watched her spread out her napkin, saw the silver spoon in the white hand slit the dull gold of the melon. Then, conscious that she had been staring, she looked quickly away." (177)

[25] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 124.

Under Irene's observation, Clare's contact intensifies in its eroticism not only because of the furtiveness of Irene's gaze but also because all of these exchanges (between Irene and Clare, between Clare and the waiter) are negotiated in a public space exclusively for white people. The publicity of Clare's offering of familiarity to the waiter intensifies two facets of her public identification—her whiteness and her presumed straightness. They also enable Irene's lingering gaze *because* they are so publicly recognizable as stable, normative, and white performances. The seemingly normative space of this encounter stabilizes each person's presumed identification. In any other location, the possibility of queer intrusions and the presence of people of color within the neutral territory of this hotel would be prohibitively hostile to such presences. The mere fact of their implausible presence makes Clare and Irene's contact a kind of secret both along the vectors of their race and sexuality: because they are strangers, they can be present, but such presences require the strict maintenance of the boundaries of normally that they each abut.

When Irene passes, she passes doubly: not only as a white woman, but as a straight woman able to exchange furtive glances because she herself is engaged in a furtiveness that she would otherwise deride in Clare. Clare throws these boundaries into disarray, however, when she meets Irene's gaze. When Irene notes the "persistent attention" of Clare, she can feel her "color heighten"—yet she still looks up and "for a moment her brown eyes politely retuned the stare of the other's black ones, which never for an instant waivered" (178). The return of Clare's gaze prompts two reflections: first, as she "stole another glance," Irene observed "what strange languorous eyes she had!" (178). Next, as an "inner disturbance, odious and hatefully familiar" rose in her, Irene wondered: "Did that woman, could that woman, somehow know that there before her very eyes on the roof of the Drayton sat a Negro?" (178). To recognize queer desire,

then, has direct political implications for the tenuous positions that Irene and Clare differentially inhabit as white or black subjects, implications that Irene longs to keep separate.

More is at stake in the language of Irene's longing than Judith Butler's observation that the mere act of "passing itself seems to eroticize Clare."[26] Through the political liminality evoked by framing queer desire as being alien and foreign, a tension erupts in the novel from Clare's difference and her desirability in a language that associates queerness with civic exclusion. The tension impacts Irene with a brutal force. Clare's selfish disinterest in secure belongings is as enticing as Clare's aesthetic qualities because of its rejection of political affiliations in general. When Larsen writes that Irene saw "nothing sacrificial in Clare Kendry's idea of life, no *allegiance* beyond her own immediate desire," she dismisses Clare first and foremost on the basis of her unclear affiliation—an affiliation that references Clare's passing as white as well as her queer intimacy with Irene (172). As Brian Carr documents, the fluidity of these volatile forms of racial and sexual exclusion are mutually constitutive.[27] Irene's desire in part stems from Clare's ability to inhabit a liminal position: by passing as white, Clare moves between white and black worlds as a kind of free radical, with a fluidity that Irene feels shame and anger for envying.[28] Before addressing Clare's desirability, Irene frames Clare as a political

[26] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 125.

[27] Brian Carr, for example, argues that symptomatic reading that "turn from race to homosexuality" through "paranoid reading practices propped on a prescripted understanding of delusional jealousy . . . assume that sexuality is a more volatile category than race in [novel's like] *Passing*." By viewing race as but another key by which to understand the psychological interplay that represses Irene's and Clare's sexual longings, Carr argues that paranoid reading practice threatens to evacuate the novel of one surface of content in favor of another, turning its substantive engagement with race into merely another way of understanding the cross-racial dynamics that submerge queerness. Brian Carr, "Paranoid Interpretation, Desire's Nonobject, and Nella Larsen's 'Passing,'" *PMLA* 119, no. 2 (2004): 282–95, 292.

[28] Similar to Richard Bruce Nugent's description of his lover, Beauty, as being Hispanic, Larsen exoticizes Clare through her potential for being "Mexican or Italian" (178). See also Dickel, *Black/Gay* (2011), 92 n248

free radical whose outsider status entices Irene, because it places Clare outside of the systems (matrimony and bourgeois black politics) that govern Irene's life. Put another way, Irene finds Clare desirable precisely because of Clare's association with foreignness and with her lack of allegiance, qualities that in other contexts would constitute a social and political threat.

Through Irene's attention to the impact Clare has on her social and political life, *Passing* registers both racial and sexual transgression as a political problem of exclusion because on both accounts Clare destabilizes the marginal ways in which Irene has built social legitimacy for herself and her family. By contrast, we find that Clare's transgression is in fact extremely dangerous even if it appears liberated. These two attitudes conflate Clare's sexual mystery with her political inscrutability in that Clare says she "desire[s] to return for a moment to that life which long ago . . . she had left behind her" (174). And yet that longing stems from the danger of Clare's fluidity: she has concealed her black heritage from her impossibly racist white husband (174). Later on, one of Irene's rejections of Clare centers around the potential social "front-page notoriety" she would cause to Irene's upward mobility as a socialite and organizer for the Negro Welfare League (186). As Corine Blackmer writes, Irene's "sexual and racial panic transforms her into the unwitting instrument and reinforce of social prejudices and legal prohibitions designed to keep women and African Americans in place" especially by coupling together the panic of queer identification and intimacy with simultaneous danger and fear of the sexual transgression of Clare's passing.[29] The threatened safety of these transgressions illuminates the impossibility of black female freedom, in that any divergence from the heterosexual standard threatens the embodied and civic life of black women like Irene, who seek agency through the political structures that also have a hand in their oppression. Larsen's study,

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[29] Corinne Blackmer, "The Veils of the Law: Race and Sexuality in Nella Larsen's Passing," *College Literature* 22, no. 3 (October 1995): 50–67, 58.

then, is not merely a psychological expose about the modes of belonging that structure the psychic lives of queer and black women; it is also a study of the legal regimes that in the early twentieth century made deviant life scrutinized, dangerous, and threatening.

Ultimately, it is *because* both are so alien in almost any public space that they can share this moment of intimate contact and identification. Their shared sexual desire channels through their shared racial identity, both of which are equally suppressed at this singular moment of their contact. Since their attraction emerges in hostile territory, Irene is able to subordinate her feelings for Clare behind the curiosity of their mutual passing. When in private space, however, Irene is surprised by the force of her feelings, which forces her to contend with—and ultimately attempt to repress—her desire. When Clare intrudes on Irene's private sanctum later in the novel and "dropped a kiss on Irene's curls," Irene forgets her irritation with Clare's unforgivable race politics. After Irene declares "Dear god! But aren't you lovely, Clare," her expostulation appears possible only when in private (224-25). Larsen only permits expressions of desire in secluded spaces. Otherwise, Clare's public intimacy with Irene does little but to raise Irene's wrath. Larsen's attention to the places in which public and private identifications occur indicates that Irene at least has difficulty imagining a subjectivity outside state regulation and policing of sexual expression. That, for Larsen, is why being alien is to be both queer and racially other: these forms of subjectivity exist outside of the state and are recognizable only insofar as they are interdicted. It is exactly those interdictions that Irene longs to escape, even when she finds the undiscovered country of Clare's reciprocal contact terrifying both to imagine and to desire.

Gendering Utopian Queerness

Irene's furtive desire for Clare starkly contrasts with her fraught, sexless relationship with her husband. Brian's role in the novel, however, is not merely to demonstrate the seeming misdirection of Irene's sexual feelings: it is to show the ways in which foreignness unequally signifies queer potential between women and men. Where Clare attracts Irene through being "alien" and having frayed allegiances, her attractive qualities find a negative mirror in Brian. For Clare, being exotic entices; for Brian, the desire for the exotic and international, specifically for Brazil's sexually freewheeling and racially equitable culture, splits Irene from her partner, amplifying a difference rather than tightening an attachment. Indeed, Larsen indicates that their marriage is not exactly the model of heterosexual intimacy and may be a product of political convenience. After Brian critiques his marriage with Irene, he finds that "it is South America that attracts him" because of a "disgust for his profession and his country," which drives a wedge that threatens their marriage (203, 213). The threat to their marriage is predicated on the rupture separating Irene's racially identified politics from Brain's more emancipatory leanings. Where exoticism and foreign qualities act as a vessel for Irene's queer interest in Clare, however, they cause a rift in the heterosexual context of their marriage. In this sense, the very transgression that permits Irene's desire for Clair simultaneously forms her disgust for Brian.

Brian Redfield's desire for expatriation to Brazil raises a different mode of separation from U.S. sexual and racial regimes—one in which the racial and sexual liberation in Brazil conjures the prospects of queer contact between men that would be possible in the public sphere. Foreignness as a cue for queerness operates then differently for the texts men and women: where it offers Brian a utopian potential, for Irene it indexes a feeling of isolation, closetedness, and privatization that deeply inhibits the revolutionary potential of her queer feelings and the

prospects of their durable expression. By contrasting the differential opportunities offered by Larsen's deployment of feeling alien and outside as a placeholder for feeling queer, we can begin to unpack Larsen's approach to the gendered politics of theses of queer utopian, diasporic possibility that contextualizes many figurations of queer desire in the Renaissance.

As with Irene's initial dislike of Clare, the strife between Irene and Brian stems from his deviation from her racial politics. For Brian, Irene's animated concern with policing racial binaries of belonging and non-belonging for political and social purposes are, as he frankly claims, irrelevant. Replying to Irene's mounting irritation with Clare's racial passing, he replies: "I don't know what race is" and later claims that the reproductive "instinct of the race to survive and expand" validates passing as an enterprise. When Irene claims that this is "rot" and a "general biological phrase" Brian counters that reproduction itself has a racist history: he declares that "everything can" be explained by an instinct to survival and upholds the "so-called whites, who've left bastards all over the known earth" as an example (216). The whole argument prompts in Irene an intense dislike of her husband: she feels it is unfair for him "after all these years to still blame her like this" for remaining in New York and pursuing a professional career (217). The effect is destabilizing: she claims that "his success proved that she'd been right in insisting that he stick to his profession right there in New York" – yet she also feels a "fear, which crouched, always deep down within her, stealing away the sense of security, the feeling of permanence, from the life which she had so admirably arranged for them all" (217). This fear, which stems from "that strange, and to her fantastic, notion of Brian's of going off to Brazil, which, though unmentioned, yet lived within him" (217). Foreign desire quickly turns into expatriate leanings, when Brian Redfield expresses a wish to disaffiliate not only from Harlem politics, but from the U.S., and even from his wife and their reproductive legacy. In effect, Brian

wishes to depart from or perhaps to transcend the identity categories that regulate his public expression and that disallow his queerness. The internal, strange, fantastic desire for lives within Brian "unmentioned" evokes a kind of closeted desire—one that mirrors Irene's, except that Brian has a possible outlet for his expression that Irene cannot imagine for herself.

This political desire for disaffiliation because of his national shame in fact buttresses readings of Brian's queerness.[30] As David Blackmore explains, Larsen herself invites such readings: she describes Brian's desire for Brazil as a "queer restlessness . . . a craving for some place strange and different" that leaves him "possessed of that unreasonable restless feeling."[31] References to Brazil, a country where "homosexuality has long been a visible cultural force," might indicate a buried desire, especially since Brian's wish for expatriation compounds his marital problems.[32] By projecting his desires outside of Harlem's limited political spectrum, Brian indicates that the act of expatriation opens up modes of more capacious being that are unavailable in a U.S. public sphere that demands more streamlined political attachments.

Two opposing and subterranean feelings separate Brian and Irene: on the one hand, Irene desires a concrete social placement and security above all else. On the other, Brian's desire to expatriate to Brazil, to leave America and its politics, and by extension, his wife and her convictions, demonstrates the coercive quality of the very things in which Irene is socially and politically invested. In other words, the stability Irene wishes to find in local politics enacts a form of oppression for Brian. It is because of Brian's dismissive relation to his professed job of "uplifting the brother" that Irene especially fears the possibilities of the "disastrous quarrelling"

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[30] For more on Brian's potential homosexuality, see Corinne Blackmer, "The Veils of the Law," 52.

[31] Blackmore, "That Unreasonable Restless Feeling," 477.

[32] Ibid., 477.

from when Irene "firmly opposed him", an opposition that "hinted at a dissolution of their marriage in the event of his persisting in his idea" (218). For Irene, it is "impossible!" that Brian retain his desire to expatriate—in part because of her willful repression of his subject position and his potential queerness in her own mind. Believing herself to have a "special talent for understanding him," she convinces herself that his desire to depart had "died;" and yet, Irene remains "conscious, in some instinctive, subtle ways, that she had been merely deceiving herself for a while and that it still lived. But it *would* die . . . She had only to direct and guide her man, to keep him going in the right direction" (218). Much as Irene wavers between desire and hatred for Clare, her feelings for her husband migrate between a recognition of his queer difference, and a need to recover their mutual normalcy through the safety of heterosexuality.

For Irene, Brian's expatriate desires are so troubling in part because they disrupt familiar equations for civil and social life. When expressing the hope that Brian's wish to move to Brazil would "die," however, Irene escalates her rhetoric dramatically: in effect, she calls for a death to the queer feelings, both in herself and in Brian, that so completely threaten to upend her life (219). As with Irene's hatred of Clare's racial disavowal, Irene situates her wish for Brian's feelings to die as a being located in a more reasonable political position: when Irene claims she "didn't like changes, particularly changes that affected the smooth routine of the household," she situates her critique of Brain in the need to preserve a stable domesticity (219). But the threat of change, and the specter of Brazil have haunted their marriage since its inception, as an implicit rebuke to Irene's sense of family stability and the importance of that family to her social and political ambitions in Harlem. In the face of this threat, Irene remains surprised at the "power" Brian's politics had "to flare up and alarm her" prompting Irene to feel that "something would have to be done. And Immediately" to quell the threat (219). Irene's panic at losing control,

however, shows how completely the utopian politics Brian imagines in Brazil depend on a queer fantasy in which Irene has no place.

Irene's response is to double-down on the systems the very systems of power that entrap her, Brian, and Clare alike. In an attempt to reassert her authority over Brian, Irene invokes their children, tapping into the well-worn discourse of national and reproductive time in order to neutralize Brian's expatriate desire and the non-national queerness it appears to imply.[33] By redirecting an argument about their political separation to their reproductive futurity and the life of their son, Irene deploys their child and his development to thread their marriage as more important than any political conviction or career aspiration. The child and his futurity supersede any other domestic dispute: in raising their son, Irene forces the domestic back into its stable privileged site and masks the queer undertones of their shared conflict. Irene's attempt to neutralize Brian's politics, however, takes an unstable turn when she directs Brian's attention to their son's sexual education. Relating a discussion with their son, Irene reports that he has "picked up some queer ideas about things—some things—from the older boys" (219). For Irene, these "queer ideas" seem loaded – as Brian evades traffic, itself symbolic, she was "watching Brian's face closely. On it was a peculiar expression. Was it, could it possibly be, a mixture of scorn and distaste?" (220). Subsequently, Brian asks whether these "queer ideas" suggest that Irene "mean[s] ideas about sex" to which Irene replies "ye-es. Not quite nice one's. Dreadful jokes, and things like that" (220). Irene's attempt to divert her sexual conflict with Brian to the psychological normalcy she wishes for her children, however, fails. When Brian replies "if sex

[33] In this gesture to the normativity of reproduction, Irene falls into the grasp of the reproductive futurism described by Lee Edelman. Edelman describes the way that "the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought," which is in many ways Irene's conundrum. See *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

isn't a joke, what is it?" he indicates that Irene's attempt to redirect a conversation to anodyne domesticity would fail. Contrary to Irene's desire to excise discussions of sex from their son's life, Brian declares that "the sooner and more he learns about sex, the better for him. And most certainly if he learns that it's a grand joke, the greatest in the world. It'll keep him from lots of disappointments later on" (220). The yoking together in these brief pages of Brian's sexual dissatisfaction and his desire to expatriate, as well as his latent anger at his wife, thus join in queerness that is both international in scope and deeply charged with sexual dissatisfaction.

In effect, Brian's critique of the U.S. and his desire to disaffiliate from the nation poses not just a threat to Irene's marriage which is critical to Irene's sense of civic belonging. As their conflict over the sexual education of their son indicates, the desire to live outside of normal national and social bounds is thus deeply connected to a sense of queerness that has political implications within the family and in the way the family might break down by being stretched internationally. Moreover, Brian's desire to expatriate shows the radicalism of a queerness that Irene cannot acknowledge within herself. As such, Brian's expatriate desire, and the queerness that subtends it, also questions the political projects to which Irene commits. Brian rejects the forms of value that Irene holds dear—because for him they are deeply unjust.

More importantly, in discussing Brian's frayed intimacies and Clare's desirability through a rhetoric of national non-belonging, Larsen conceals Irene's sexual infatuation beneath Irene's interest in civic and political allegiance.[34] Irene appears unaware that the way Brian's desire to disaffiliate from U.S. racial violence represents a more just politics than Clare's lack of any allegiance. As such, Larsen equates Irene's suppressed queer attraction to Clare as a political

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[34] In contrast to Irene, Clare appears to find a kind of generative possibility in her husband's global itinerary, and his exploration of "all kinds of savage places" across "three continents" (229). Brian provides the negative image to Clare's husband in his disavowal of Western terms of barbarism and imperialism.

problem, showing the limits of Irene's own allegiance to race and the superficiality of her investment in Harlem's bourgeois politics. The symptom of the problem for Larsen, however, is not in a moral fault of Irene's, but of the structural inequality through which the utopian possibility that Brian can imagine in Brazil is unavailable to Irene entirely. Clare's lack of allegiance entices as much as it horrifies Irene because it posits the possibility of living in the world that they inhabit without being subject to its racialized damage and queer phobia. Where Brian has a model to reach towards, Irene has only an increasingly tenuous and unlikely fantasy of a queer world in the United States that remains safe in private, and thus, without sacrifice.

Limited Intimacy: Queer Feelings in Private

Imagining a durable queer space in private between Irene and Clare proves problematic, even when Irene deeply desires to maintain her secretive contact with Clare. Despite the danger Clare presents to Irene in terms of disrupting her family and her political status with the Negro Welfare League, their intimacy immediately returns when they meet in private: attempting to reject Clare and return to Brain, Irene practices her justification for ostracizing Clare. However, private contact allows Irene's queer feelings to rise unbidden:

> But that was as far as she got in her rehearsal. For Clare had come softly into the room without knocking and, before Irene could greet her, had dropped a kiss on her dark curls. Looking at the woman before her, Irene Redfield had a sudden inexplicable onrush of affectionate feeling. Reaching out, she grasped Clare's two hands in her own and cried with something like awe in her voice: "Dear God! But aren't you lovely Clare!" ... Irene looked away. She had that uncomfortable feeling that one has when one has not been wholly kind or wholly true. (225)

When Clare feels that she is being rejected, Irene declares that a continued intimacy between them would be "terribly foolish, and not just the right thing" which presents a multiply fronted challenge to Irene's mode of social being: first it challenges her sense of permissible feelings, and second her feelings of safety (225). What Irene finds threatening in Clare is her "ability for a quality of feeling that was to her strange and even repugnant" (226). Larsen writes that for Irene "safety and security were all important" —and Clare challenges the premises of Irene's safety—partially by her racial passing, but also partially by her sexual expressiveness. What seems to terrify Irene from the first moment that she encounters Clare at the Drayton is that her sexual expressiveness, both to other men and to Irene, occurs in public spaces that Irene cannot control.

This border crossing forces Irene to confront the fact that where Clare's inability to have "an entirely serene life" because of "that dark secret forever crouching in the background of her consciousness" somehow implicates Irene's own desires as well. Where with Clare that conscious is racial, with Irene it is sexual; but Clare can transgress the borders that Irene holds to resolutely. The conflation and indeterminacy here is as important as the fact that Clare's unmasking as black occurs in Irene's domestic space, forcing Irene into contact with the limits if her "security" which "was the most important desired thing in life" (267). For Irene, serenity means the security of her domestic space, marriage, and her political work with the Negro Welfare League. But when Irene believes that serenity is threatened, she is forced to contend with the repression of her desire for something different in an argument with Brian. When Irene concludes that Brian and Clare are having an affair, she spins into a melancholic repressive episode that ultimately drives her to imagine murdering Clare: when thinking back on Brian and Clare's relationship, she finds it "queer that now she didn't know, couldn't recall" whether or not Brian's emotional response to Irene had always been "pitiably bare" even while she

simultaneously reflects that "Clare's ivory face was what it always was, beautiful, caressing" (253). Irene is left "caught between two allegiances, different, yet the same. Herself. Her race. Race! The thing that bound and suffocated her" such that "whatever step she took, or if she took none at all, something would be crushed. A person or the race. Clare herself, or the race. Or, it might be, all three" (258). As Butler argues, the third part of this critique around race and gender is the queerness that Irene wishes to be able to express.[35] But the politics of Irene's position also trap her between the two poles Brian and Clare represent concerning private and public expression: on the one hand, Brain represents the failure of the politics of her domestic life, as well as the failure of Brian's queer imagination to contain a space for Irene. On the other, Clare represents the false promise of a queer desire that is dependent on a social deception—the erasure of racial consciousness—that Irene refuses to accept. Irene faces the possibility that neither her social status nor her domestic life can stabilize the desires she wishes to claim but politically and socially feels that she cannot.

Since Clare represents such a threat to Irene's sense of control, Irene lashes out and targets Clare. For Irene, the single most important investment of her social life is "security" and to be able to "direct for their own best good the lives of her sons and her husband" (267). Clare threatens Irene's stability because she shows a pathway by which to release Irene from the political and social strictures that suffocate her. Irene cannot see these pathways as anything but a rejection of her nationalist and local belonging in Harlem. Instead of worrying about Clare's intimacy with Brian per se, all she can think about are "ways to keep Brian by her side in New York. For she would not go to Brazil. She belonged to this land of rising towers . . . she grew from this soil and she would not be uprooted. Not even because of Clare Kendry or a hundred

[35] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 125.

Clare Kendrys" (267). When Irene declares that she could not leave "not even because of Clare," by contrast Clare holds a privileged status with the possibility of abandoning her affiliations in New York and America behind. Ultimately, with both Brian and Irene, queer desire can be recognized for its international promise, by charting pathways of desire that extend outside of the nation, just as Brian desires a life in Brazil and Clare prompts Irene to consider the conditions that could prompt her to abandon the culture and country with which she is most familiar and invested. The irony is that Brian encourages Irene to break with Clare, foreclosing one pathway of her escape from the U.S. social environment that Brian himself wishes to leave behind. Irene's disavowal of these potential pathways marks their potency and power. As the novel progresses, those pathways become more significant the more that Irene represses them.

Afterwards, when Clare has fallen to her death, Irene's imagination shifts her rejected fantasy of an international migration with Clare in a different direction entirely. When she stays behind in the room from which Clare fell to her death "staring at a ridiculous Japanese print on the wall across the room" thinking about Clare's sudden disappearance from her life, she evokes a longstanding queer orientalist trope that provided a productive space for Bruce Nugent to theorize queer feelings outside of national limitations.[36] Where the oriental liberated Nugent's imagination, for Irene its invocation is a product of death. Only then can Irene lament her unrealized desire: she laments that Clare is "Gone! The soft white face, the bright hair, the disturbing scarlet mouth, the dreaming eyes, the caressing smile, the whole torturing loveliness that had been Clare Kendry" (272). When Irene finally considers Clare's beauty while staring at a Japanese print, she charts her desire for Clare through an orientalist aesthetic that transgresses

[36] See Charles Michael Smith, "Bruce Nugent: Bohemian of the Harlem Renaissance," in *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*, ed. Joseph Beam (Boston: Alyson, 1986), 209–20; Fiona I. B. Ngô, *Imperial Blues: Geographies of Race and Sex in Jazz Age New York* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

national territory in ways she couldn't realize either with Brian or with Clare. For Irene to think queerly necessitates transgressing the borders that constrain her and considering how her affiliations as a woman and a member of the black bourgeoisie limit her being in the world. In the end, Clare's death represents the final victory of local and familiar attachments over Irene, and the failure of queerness to offer her a viable mode of living.

The liberation passively suggested at the political level in Brian, and, problematically invited at the racial level by Clare's various disavowals, however, ultimately escapes Irene. In the end, Larsen's depiction of Irene's psychic damage emphasizes the limits of affiliative politics. By counter example, Larsen suggests that to disaffiliate from identity, local, and national sites of political engagements offers a mode of queer possibility and a pathway outside of the strictures that ultimately rend Irene's life. Since expatriation charts these modes of queer rejection of family, nation, and racial belonging, Brian models the spaces that queerness can open—but excludes Irene entirely. In framing his queerness through his desire for an expatriate life outside the U.S., Brian condemns the localized politics that Irene values as complacent with violent systems of power. The option for expatriation that he raises also shows how Irene's queer desire for Clare, itself predicated in part on a fantasy of her otherness that is national as well as racial, is truer than the confines of the Harlem political scene. In the end, Larsen forecloses the options for queer expression Brian and Clare offer, one for excluding women, the other for being predicated on the erasure of black heritage. Both reassert a kind of white supremacy and patriarchy that limit the utopian possibility of the queer expression in public and private. Larsen's wish to be queer is to reject the local, and to find in the global a kind belonging is powerful because it is unaligned. In *Passing*, however, that wish meets with a radical disappointment, and the realization that queer black women especially have no such option.

2. Quicksand's Queer Dimension

Quicksand reversed the direction of *Passing*'s analysis. The novel emphasizes Helga's feelings of racial non-belonging, where *Passing* normalized Irene as a member of the black bourgeoisie, at least on the surface. When Larsen emphasizes that Helga was different from her fellow black Americans, she emphasizes a racial and national liminality on account of Helga's mixed African American and Danish heritage. After moving between Naxos, Chicago, and New York, Helga reflects that even with people of her own race she felt "inexplicable, alien": "She didn't, in spite of her racial markings, belong to these dark segregated people. She was different. She felt it . . . It was something broader, deeper, that made folk kin" (86). Moreover, Helga's experience of life as a "division … into two parts in two lands, into physical freedom in Europe and spiritual freedom in America" speaks to more than what Hazel Carby diagnoses as Helga's "alienation" from "her sex, her race, and her class" (125).[37] In contrast to Irene Redfield's insistence on stasis, stability, safety, and placement, Helga meanders across the nation and across the Atlantic in a quest for a form of identification and membership in which structural racism and gender essentialism will not constrict her life. Seeking alternatives to her feeling of displacement at home for being half-black and half Danish, Helga seeks a world elsewhere: her transatlantic itinerary moves her between political communities from the rural South, New York, and between uncomfortable family alliances in Chicago and Copenhagen. In the face of these attachments and obligations, Helga desires only "intentional isolation"—to be removed from the politics of biracial existence and attachment, of not having a home either in black or white communities, in the U.S. or Europe (36).

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[37] Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 169.

This intentional isolation cuts to the quick of Helga's deeper feeling of difference: her queer attachments to women that prompt each of her migrations in the United States and across the Atlantic. Yet where *Passing* charted queer feeling through the possibility of extranational liberation across the globe, *Quicksand* offers a counterpoint: the novel sublimates Helga Crane's queer feelings into her transatlantic migration and appears to conceal moments of intimacy with women that are secluded from the public gaze. *Passing* is stuck in place, looking for queer possibility elsewhere; *Quicksand* executes the international mobility Irene aestheticizes, but pivots Helga's inter- and intra-national movement around moments of prohibited attachment to women. For both novels, queer expression between women is deeply privatized: but where *Passing* sees private expression of queer feeling as a destabilizing threat, Helga finds a deep, if ephemeral, comfort in her experiences with women in private. The subtext evokes a feeling of queerness that suffuses the text but never rises to the same analytic mode of Larsen's direct critiques of the role of Helga's race and gender in shaping her experience of exclusion.

A barely contained queer longing appears with a remarkable consistency at each juncture of Helga's trans-urban and transnational avoidance of men: each of Helga's many decisions to migrate are caused by professions of intimacy from men. In almost each occasion, male declarations of affection coincide with expressions of female intimacy that prompt Helga to reject male courtship. The novel's queerness emerges in these tenuous moments where the offerings of a stable heteronormative relationship drive Helga to wish for and imagine intimate, domestic desire for women. These expressions, however, are fleeting. At the level of plot, then, queerness inflects each of Helga's quests for community and kinship: the presence of women offers an intimacy, friendship, and a desire that Helga cannot verbally acknowledge for fear of, in recognizing that desire, empowering it.

The scenes repeat across the text. From the novel's opening, for example, Helga shares an intimate moment in her bedroom with her friend Margaret before escaping a potential engagement to James Vayle, her colleague at Naxos, and fleeing to Chicago. Adrift in Chicago, Helga migrates again to New York and moves in with her friend Anne. In New York, Helga expresses a frustration with the intimacies offered by Dr. Robert Anderson, her former Headmaster in Naxos, in part by lamenting how those intimacies affect her friendship with her housemate. The complications that arise from Anderson's professions of affection as well as Anderson and Anne's interest in race politics prompt Helga to leave New York to seek her mother's family in Denmark. Upon settling in Copenhagen, Helga becomes intimate with the painter Alex Olsen. She ultimately rejects his informal intimacy and marriage proposal, nominally because she misses black people in a reversal of her justification of leaving Anne behind. Even here, Helga justifies her return because of a marriage invitation from Anne and Dr. Anderson. At each moment of Helga's migration, her intimacy with men fails and is redirected to the women who seem to provide Helga with a feeling of solace that is both emotional and aesthetic. Finally, the novel ends in Helga's marriage to the Southern preacher Reverend Pleasant Greene, a departure that follows a sudden erotic kiss with Dr. Anderson, who has recently married Anne. The kiss itself queers the encounter because it excites Helga because of its potential to infuriate Anne rather than due to an erotic interest in Anderson. The infelicitous marriage to Reverend Greene is marked by a heterosexual malaise made more painful for Helga because she has been removed from both the intellectual community and the contact with female equals that had been so important to her throughout the novel. When the novel leaves Helga in

the midst of a depression and at the cusp of a fifth, presumably deadly, pregnancy, Larsen subverts what otherwise might appear a textbook heteronormative conclusion.[38]

In *Passing*, Irene's major conflict concerned what it meant for the stability of her political and marital life to have and express queer feelings in private. That drama does not concern Helga, who embraces such feelings in private, but whose private spaces themselves provide only an ephemeral comfort. Just as Irene's fascination with Clare depends on an international imaginary, Helga's private spaces channel queerness through international themes that do not index a fixed referent or locale for utopian queer expression. Instead, they reach to an imaginative world elsewhere that is primarily figured in orientalist terms that appear enticing because they escape any familiar Euro-American national or cultural framework. Unlike in *Passing*'s imaginary, when Larsen cathects Helga's queer feelings onto orientalist objects, she evokes an international itinerary outside of the transatlantic and intra-national circulation Helga traces as she avoids men throughout *Quicksand*. Through the ephemeral encounters these objects represent, Helga's sense of international nonbelonging, displacement, and alienation moves away from Western models of self-identification to search for something novel and unburdened.

Positioning object orientalism as positive vessels for black female sexual expression moves away from the explicitly political and national frameworks of alienation to focus on more ephemeral queer attachments. Uri McMillan describes how the "counterintuitive logic" of "objecthood" provides a "way towards agency rather than its antithesis" when it comes to the representation of black women and black female sexuality.[39] This methodology allows us to look

[38] For a discussion of the novel's gender politics, see Kimberley Roberts, "The Clothes Make the Woman: The Symbolics of Prostitution in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 107–30.

[39] Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 9.

beyond what Kimberley Monda has called Larsen's "bitter, sarcastic vision of Helga's entrapment" that stems from Helga's "failure" to find the "recognition she does not receive from the men in her life."[40] McMillan's proposal for representing female agency and female subjectivity helps us to think outside of entrapment and alienation. Conversely, he proposes that objects "disrupts presumptive knowledges of black subjectivity" to excavate "forms of subjectivity and agency" that are "always present, however miniscule they may be" in the performance of objecthood itself.[41] The fact that Larsen takes pleasure in in describing scenes of female intimacy that are not afforded to Helga's proximity to men gestures to a type of agency by virtue of what those objects reject—men and western evaluative systems alike. When gesturing to a minimal form of agency, these momentary bursts of desire indicate a form of political removal not afforded in *Passing*. These orientalist objects and their dense evocation of desire provide a model for Helga's queer disaffiliation: they reference a cultural world outside of the rights-based discourses that circulate in the West, and imagine a deeply private world of attachment that purposefully avoids being locked into words, identities, or types.

McMillan's description of a provisional agency made visible in objects adds nuance to the modes of objectification Claudia Tate and Hazel Carb diagnose in the black femininity of Larsen's fiction. For Carby and Tate, the absence of a positive vision of black femininity stems from the larger psychological trauma faced by black women in America. According to Claudia Tate, the "heterosexual economy" in which Helga circulates and from which Helga wishes to liberated, frames Helga's "unnamable" and "enigmatic longing" as a kind of escape from the

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[40] Kimberley Monda, "Self-Delusion and Self-Sacrifice in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*," *African American Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 23–39, 24.

[41] McMillan, *Embodied Avatars*, 9

patriarchal control of her body (Tate 121,123).[42] In a concurring vein, Carby suggests that Helga's sexual expression rejects the "racist sexual ideologies" surrounding black woman as "rampant sexual beings," which causes the novel to end in a "tragedy" stemming from having "repressed her sexual desires" (174). For both critics, Helga's devolution into an oppressive marriage and life-threatening pregnancy represent the damaging power of social and sexual stigma that black women face, which suggests that Larsen's critique in *Quicksand* centers around the abject position of the black woman. However, their critiques do not account for the way in which the women of the novel attract Helga's gaze and find analogous representation in objects that grant Helga aesthetic pleasure.[43] These positions obviate any possible claim of agency and any gesture towards a world outside systemic oppression.

Reading for queerness uncovers not female subjugation, but the utopian possibility afforded by the presences of women as aesthetic and, sometimes, erotic objects. Almost uniformly, Helga is drawn to women rather than men, granting women a kind of aesthetic value and intimate proximity withheld in the context of more standard heteronormative attachments. These forms of pleasure, in contrast to the abjection Tate and Carby diagnose in Helga's interactions with men, suggests queer possibility, however limited and ephemeral. By locating agency in the least agential of things, Larsen finds a productive space for resistance, however provisionally, in modes of expression that imagine themselves outside all boundaries of political

[42] Larsen understands that to express active sexual desire for a black woman conjures what both Tate and Carby agree are tropes of licentious black female sexuality that have historically been used to circumscribe and prosecute the intimate lives of black women.

[43] Moreover, Carby discusses how Helga ultimately has the "control of her body denied" and her sexuality "reduced to her biological capacity to bear children" by the novel's end. Tate locates Helga's sexual repression psychoanalytically in as an impulse stemming from a sexualized desire for Helga's lost father. Carby, *Reconstruction of Womanhood*, 174, 147. Claudia Tate, "Desire and Death in Quicksand, by Nella Larsen," *American Literary History* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 234–60, 254.

representation. They represent moments of eruptive joissance that queer theorists suggest provides a hopeful, if limited, potential to break through a violent social order and to imagine something liberating and new.[44] As the remainder of this chapter will show, though *Quicksand* inevitably engages with irresolvable problems of racial, sexual, and national policing, Larsen presents a form of social stability that, however minimally, finds possibility in the oriental and female objects whose inscrutable circulation avoids political entrapment. Though the novel begins suggesting a hopeful mode of escape, however, that hope will collapse by its conclusion.

Orientalist Aesthetics, Female Objects, and Queer Desire

From *Quicksand*'s first paragraph, Larsen pays particular attention to the ephemeral scene, giving private spaces an intimacy, intensity, and brevity whose pleasure contrasts with the displacement and alienation of Helga's migrations. These scenes are notable for their repeating orientalist languor. At the beginning of the novel, Larsen positions Helga intimately "alone in her room" and surveys the objects of the scene: she describes Helga under the "soft gloom" of a "single reading lamp" that made a "pool of light on the blue Chinese carpet," and focalizes her gaze subsequently on the "oriental silk which covered the stool at her slim feet" (35). By lingering on Helga's body as an object in an orientalized scene, Larsen anticipates how Helga herself judges female intimacy—as an objects of aesthetic value marked first by orientalist proximity, and then by the gaze of the observer herself. Larsen's aesthetic gaze, then, slips from

[44] Mari Ruti recently discusses the role of utopian thinking in imagining more ethical worlds. Taking on Edelman's wish for an absolute, earth-shattering joissance, Ruti writes: "I have always read it as the source of everything that is worthwhile about human life, for the fact that we cannot attain ultimate satisfaction (absolute joissance) does not mean that we cannot get any satisfaction, that there is no joissance to be had, that the worldly objects we encounter cannot offer us any 'real' pleasure" (73). This mediation between the aspirational joissance and the quotidian could be thought of as an ethical drive for social betterment. Mari Ruti, *The Ethics of Opting out: Queer Theory's Defiant Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

these objects to her negligee, synecdochally connecting Helga to the objects that are first vested with aesthetic quality. Larsen writes of Helga:

> An observer would have thought her well fitted to that framing of light and shade. A slight girl of twenty-two years with narrow, sloping shoulders and delicate but well-turned arms and legs, she had, none the less, an air of radiant, carless health. In vivid green and gold negligee, and glistening brocaded mules, deep sunk in the big high-backed chair, against whose tapestry her sharply cut face, with skin like yellow satin, was distinctively outlined, she was—to use a hackneyed word—attractive. (36)

The attraction periphrastically recognized by Larsen's attention to the direction of her narratorial gaze becomes an interpretative tool by which to understand the whole scene. In this passage, Larsen's narrator aesthetically frames an object of value through the light and the furnishings of Helga's tasteful room. Syntactically, Larsen delays and minimizes her aesthetic judgment—after a long, appositive description, she admits that Helga is, staged as if a piece of furniture herself (and thus, analogically akin to the orientalist trappings of Helga's apartment) "to use a hackneyed word—attractive." Syntactic deferral, alongside the roundabout way in which the narratorial gaze settles on Helga's desirability, indicates a purposeful distancing from the attractiveness of the object itself. She writes that her attention to Helga follows "the features on which an observer's attention would fasten" – especially her "curly blue-black hair" which "just then" was "tumbled, falling unrestrained about her face and on her shoulders" (36). The emphasis on the neutral observer allows Larsen to deemphasize the evaluative role of the novel's narrator, and thus to suppress the intimacy of this description and setting, inviting a privacy and intimacy instead that, though queer, remains unquestioned and unscrutinized.

The narratorial gaze and the object, at this point, merge in their elicitation of queer desire. When Helga is joined by her colleague Margaret—who Helga describes as "the most congenial member" of Naxos' faculty to "appreciate[] her" (47). With Margaret's arrival, Larsen upends Helga's isolation and emphasizes the expressions of desire that are possible between women in private. Once "seeing Helga still in a night robe seated on the bedside in a mass of cushions, idly dangling a mule across bare toes like one with all the time in the world for her," Larsen invites an intimacy that is, if not explicitly erotic, then certainly beyond the confines of a simple friendship (48). Though Helga cannot profess anything like love, because "she was now in love with the piquancy of leaving" Naxos, the scene retains an erotic charge. After Margaret's departure, "automatically her fingers adjusted the Chinese-looking pillows on the low couch that served for her bed" (49). In the automatic motion, Helga channels Margaret's sudden absence into the need for a physical proximity that she projects onto the pillows, whose foreign appearance receives the contact Helga could not grant to Margaret. The projection and redirection allow Helga to express a kind of desire that she otherwise suppresses.

When describing how Helga redirects her physical desire into the caress of objects upon Margaret's departure, Larsen suggests a latent, if unexpressed, queer desire. When Margaret later does not return Helga's redirected desire, Helga lashes out: her feelings abruptly change from a wish to touch Margaret, to rage that rejects how Margaret has adopted white aesthetics. When Helga "wonder[s] for the hundredth time just what form of vanity it was that had induced an intelligent girl like Margaret Creighton to turn what was probably nice live crinkly hair, perfect to her smooth dark skin and agreeable round features, into a dead straight, greasy, ugly mass," Helga's critique becomes uniquely personal (48). Her barbed assessment of Margaret barely conceals Helga's attention: that Helga had wondered "for the hundredth time" about Margaret's

appearance suggests that Helga dedicates an undue, and unrequited, attention to Margaret's appearance, indicating a wish for Margaret to be beautiful in the way that Helga desires. Helga's critique of Margaret pathologizes her own desires, in that her feelings and their rapid redirection indicate queer repression and shame.[45]

This staging of queer desire through an orientalist aesthetic means that reading queerness relies on a logic of global displacement, yet following a distinctly different pathway from Helga's transatlantic and intra-American itinerary.[46] When Helga departs Naxos for Chicago and later moves to New York, she steps into another phase of intimacy that requires, as Helga's benefactor suggests, that someone can "fill in the gaps" to understand properly (74). And so, Helga meets Anne Grey, a black woman and Helga's future roommate, who Helga initially feels is "too good to be true" and who Anne finds at the age thirty to be "brownly beautiful" with the "face of a golden Madonna, grave and calm and sweet, with shining black hair and black eyes" (76). Once situated with Anne, Helga's life stabilizes in part because their intimacy rarely incorporates men—it instead languishes, much as at the novels opening, in the pleasant comfort of inter-female intimacy. As opposed to Helga's relations with men, she feels "established, secure, comfortable" with Anne and in the "charm of a new pattern of her life" free from "that tantalizing oppression of loneliness and isolation which always, it seemed, had been a part of her existence" (77). The comfort of their friendship, which Larsen at first describes with a fond solicitousness, also evokes the orientalist tropes that previously allowed homosocial intimacy to

[45] The structural consistency by which Larsen couples the presence of women with Helga's evaluation of their aesthetic pleasure invites the possibility that Helga's attachments to women extends beyond basic homosociality. Eve Sedgewick's reading in *Between Men* of the queerness subtending the representational intimacy between men in fiction buttresses a reading of the queerness beneath Larsen's female socialities in *Quicksand*.

[46] The reading I propose here depends on both Carby and Tate's approaches: it finds in orientalist objects, with their alienation from the means of their production, a cathected desire for women.

trespass into erotic possibility. When Larsen writes that Helga "approved of Anne's house and the furnishings" especially her "aesthetic sense," Larsen evokes the modes of aestheticization that begin to transmute Helga and Anne's intimacy into a shared objecthood.

Larsen luxuriates in the foreignness of Anne's aesthetic as if projecting Helga's appreciation of Anne's beauty on the objects surrounding her. Larsen lingers on these objects: she describes how they mingle "harmoniously and comfortably with brass-bound Chinese tea chests, luxurious deep chairs and davenports, tiny tables of gay color, a lacquered jade-green settee with gleaming black satin, cushions, lustrous Eastern rugs, ancient copper, Japanese prints, [and] some fine etchings" (76). The comfort Helga had felt with the "exotic" and the "queer' before now has a deeper, orientalist context in the "eastern," "Chinese," and the "Japanese" that fill an aesthetic sense that her previous suitor in Naxos, James Vayle, could not. By gazing at these objects and Anne with equal discretion, Helga channels her desires and aesthetic faculties onto objects, especially those in close proximity to women, that fill her desire in ways that transcend men. As much as Helga finds happiness in the racial makeup of Harlem and the black communities she finds there, she finds herself secured by these physical trappings that express her queer desire for security with another woman.

Following Helga's description of Anne's beauty and of the oriental intimacy of her furnishings and domestic space, Helga allows herself a rare moment of optimism. In fact, only after the narrative lingers on this intimate space can Helga acknowledge a "pleasant present and the delightful vision of an agreeable future she was contented and happy"—a future in which she feels a "sense of freedom" she had otherwise been unable to know or to allow herself (78). Helga's feelings of freedom are ephemeral, however, and her friendship with Anne quickly strains when the "racial ardor in one so little affected by racial prejudice as Anne" prompts in

Helga a return to the feelings of "her surprising oppression" which "corroded the fabric of her quietism" (80). Larsen's objective in contrasting Anne's activism with Helga's more mobile feelings of belonging in Harlem's black community is difficult to trace: at once, it appears a kind of racial diffidence, and at once a kind of self-hatred and denial that cuts to the core of Helga's feelings of nonbelonging as the daughter of an African American man and Danish woman.

Once again, Helga's subconscious understanding of political conflicts rises beside an orientalist moment that re-charts her international understanding of race on top of the international movement of orientalist objects that carry queer desire. But in this case, rising specter of Helga's racial and gendered understanding begins to occlude the easy intimacy Helga feels with Anne—and Larsen here documents the movement from Anne and Helga's shared objecthood to a form of objectification that diminishes the prospects of their shared intimacy. This diminishment hinges on the specter of racial identification forcing Helga to conform to Anne's politics—a specter that Helga insistently avoids. Upon departing for Denmark, she "daydreams of a happy future in Copenhagen" where there would be "no Negroes, no problems, no prejudice" Helga nonetheless feels a suppressed form of longing channeled through Anne's orientalist aesthetic (87). Larsen writes, as Helga "busied herself" in cleaning the apartment Helga and Anne share:

> At last she was satisfied with [the flower arrangement's] appropriateness in some blue Chinese jars of great age. Anne *did* have such lovely things, she thought as she began conscientiously to prepare for her return, although there was really little to do. Helga dusted the tops of the books, placed the magazines in ordered carelessness, redressed Anne's bed in fresh-smelling sheets of cool linen, and laid out her best pale yellow pajamas of crepe de chine. Finally she set out two tall

> green glasses and made a great pitcher of lemonade, leaving only the ginger ale and claret to be added on Anne's arrival. She was a little conscience-stricken, so she wanted to be nice to Anne, who had been so kind to her when she first came to New York, a forlorn friendless creature . . . But just the same, she meant to go, at once. (87-88)

Helga's careful attention to her shared space with Anne, as well as her appreciation of the orientalist trappings of Anne's domestic life, indicates a form of cathexis in which Helga's emotional attachments find representation through extranational objects. These objects (the Chinese jars, the pajamas of crepe de chine) themselves, in containing Helga's desire, represent a subterranean wish for homoerotic attachment.

Since Helga has decided to abandon Anne at this juncture, the description moves Helga from a shared object-relation with Anne's aesthetic qualities into an objectification of those qualities, breaking apart their radical intimacy into a more familiar form of aesthetic exchange. Helga's description mirrors her own feelings as when objectified by men. With men in general Helga feels like an object "scrutinized" for her racial positionality. With Anne, Helga conversely directs her feelings of attraction not onto Anne herself (to whom Helga expresses a certain ideological frustration) but onto the domestic features of Anne's home that can carry her desire without judgement or needing ideological positioning or interpolation. The queerness of their relationship is thus visible in the awkwardness and objectification Helga feels with men, and the contrasting security she feels in the domestic spaces she shares with Anne. But since Larsen insists that domestic desire verges on a desire that is "indefinite" for Helga, Helga ultimately removes herself so as to avoid a kind of expression that would make the limits of her heterosexual desire visible. By deflecting the queerness of Larsen's narrator and of Helga's gaze

onto objects that themselves are globally circulated, Larsen attaches queerness to the kind of internationalist nonbelonging that otherwise predominates in *Quicksand*—but charts the desires they represent on a different, non-Western circuit. The slippage in Larsen's writing by which those objects represent a female objecthood that is outside of the evaluative capacities of men invests Larsen's descriptions with a queer agency whose ephemeral qualities resist codification and recognition. In that resistance, Helga finds an ephemeral power, not in how she can be categorized, but in the categories she resists.

Queer Objecthood versus Male Objectification

The moments of shared objecthood and intimacy Helga shared with Anne and with Margaret stand in stark contrast to the inexpressible gaps in Helga's subjectivity that she feels when in close proximity to men. Subsequently, he heterosexual/queer contrast comes into stark relief when the female intimacy Helga shares with Anne collapses and their intimate, aesthetic world returns to sustained contact with men. From the outset of the novel, Helga feels a deep suspicion of the motivations of each of her suitors that she does not afford to the kindness women share with her. Moreover, when Helga feels an intimacy and draw to Margaret that turns into repulsion with Vayle, it is difficult not to read Larsen as providing a latent critique of heterosexuality—and a centering of queer feelings as the unquestioned base of Helga, and perhaps Larsen's, desire.

That Helga's feelings of failure with men, especially James Vayle, Anderson, and the artist Alex Olsen in Copenhagen, are described as "feelings of strangeness" that she "couldn't explain, put a name to" further invites reading queerness as the motivation her migratory movements (57). When Larsen writes that Helga "would never be married to James Vayle" and

that “she couldn’t have married him,” Larsen explicitly invites questions as to why.[47] Especially when Larsen documents how “there stole into [Helga’s] thoughts of him a curious sensation of repugnance, of which she was at a loss to account,” Larsen invites the kinds of gaps in sentiment and in affection that she does not entertain in Helga’s feelings with Margaret or Anne (57). Later, her encounters with Robert Anderson when waiting for a taxi in New York after leaving Anne are equally telling. Larsen describes how feels “conscious of the man’s steady gaze” as his eyes “fix[] upon her, studying her, appraising her” (81). Though Helga professes to have “rehearsed this scene, this re-encounter” it thrusts her into “a sort of aching delirium” in which “a thousand indefinite longings beset her” (82). Helga’s persistent expression of an unexpressed, inarticulate desire, a desire for a form of intimacy and contact that she can never quite identify or articulate, whose inarticulate equalities become most visible in contrast to the kinds of desire she feels should be appropriate, namely to men like Anderson or James Vayle, who Helga persistently approaches and yet as persistently retreats from.

In this dynamic, Helga turns the suspicious lens not on the queer feelings she shares with women—quite unlike Irene Redfield—but on her relationship with her suitors. One of the starkest differentiators between Helga’s feelings of intimacy with women and her feelings with men, is that in public, Helga becomes an object of male consumption. Where in private, Helga cathects her desires from women on orientalized objects whose aesthetic value emerges from their ability to evade transatlantic circuits of power, with men, Helga seems trapped by social obligation and expectation. In Helga’s relationship with the Norwegian painter, Alex Olsen,

[47] It is important that the text doesn’t equate wishing to avoid marriage with celibacy. Helga strongly critiques the matronly Miss MacGooden at Naxos for being afraid of “things in the matrimonial state that were of necessity entirely too repulsive for a lady of delicate and sensitive nature to submit to” (46). The satiric tone of Helga’s report rejects her prudishness. Sex itself doesn’t seem something to fear—rather, the structures that bind women subserviently to men.

Larsen details the damaging objectification of men most starkly. Here she converts the transformative power of queer orientalist objecthood into paternalistic objectification.

Helga's contact with Olsen is troubling on a few grounds. While seeking escape from the problematic gendered and racial politics of the United States in Copenhagen, Helga feels deeply exoticized when in Europe and objectified for her racial difference. The dynamic is especially charged with Alex Olsen because Olsen at first offers Helga what appears to be a haven from her feelings of alienation with Vayle and Anderson in the U.S. Ultimately, Helga feels that Olsen exploits her for his own artistic growth. When Olsen proposes that he paint Helga, he makes what had been the transcendent value of feminine objects into an oppressive one. The tableau that Olsen paints amplifies Helga's own feeling of being alien, racially and nationally, but the references it makes repeat a motif of desire that had previously been contained to Helga's attachment with her own orientalist desire for Anne and Margaret's company. Here, however, the agency Helga felt when cathecting desire on orientalist objects undergoes a dramatic re-channeling in part because Helga is made into an unwilling object whose value is adjudicated by Olsen's white and male gaze. Helga and Olsen's first encounter indicatives the exoticism through which Olsen views Helga, an exoticism with which she identifies but also feels that men (and white people) use to objectify her. Larsen writes of the tableau that Olsen stages to paint Helga:

> When [the packages] were opened and all the things spread out upon the sedate furnishings of her chamber, they made a rather startling array. It was almost in a mood of rebellion that Helga faced the fantastic collection of garments incongruously laid out in the quaint, stiff, pale old room. There were batik dresses in in which mingled indigo, orange, green, vermilion, and black; dresses of velvet and chiffon in screaming colors, blood red, sulphur yellow, sea green; and one

> black and white thing in striking combination. There was a black Manila shawl strewn with great scarlet and lemon flowers, a leopard-skin coat, a glittering opera cape. There were turban-like hats of metallic silks, feathers, and furs, strange jewelry, enameled or set with odd semiprecious stones, a nauseous Eastern perfume, shoes with dangerous high heels. Gradually Helga's perturbation subsided in the unusual pleasure of having so many new and expensive clothes at one time. She began to feel a little excited, incited. (103)

Not only does Alex Olsen exploit Helga's exoticism (which Helga participates in by wishing to make a "voluptuous impression" in her new city), but the terms in which he does so summon the very terms of aesthetic value and emotional attachment that Helga applied, if perhaps unwittingly, to her female friends. The array of adjectives associated with this orientalist fantasy are, in contrast to Helga's feelings of aesthetic appreciation with Anne or Margaret's objects, of the negative variety in this "startling array": there are "screaming colors" and "sulphur yellows" and a "nauseous Eastern perfume". To be alien, in this sense, registers the queerness of her desire because her feeling of alienism interferes with any expression of heterosexual belonging.

Under Alex Olsen's gaze, Helga also expresses a change in her relation to objects that negates the role oriental objects played in symbolizing permissible queer desire for women. Instead, Olsen registers Helga as object without agency. Though Helga feels an erotic enjoyment when "incited" by the "unusual pleasure" her feminized, orientalized objects afford, the eroticism of objects quickly turns into disgust once Helga realizes that her objectification as an oddity was predicated on a fascination and repression of her racial heritage. When Helga finally "wondered" if it was "race that kept him silent, held him back" from deepening his intimacy with her, it becomes clear that Helga's object status ends the prospects of any sexual fantasy (107).

The sexual fantasy Olsen circulates is quite different from the equally shared intimacy Helga seems to want from other women, even if that desire is not explicitly requited. Notably with Olsen, Helga is made into a public object for public consumption. In this transition, Larsen shows how orientalist fantasy is corrupted by patriarchal power when seen from the male gaze: Olsen finds Helga a potential romantic partner because she fulfills his exotic fantasy; the realization of that fantasy results in Helga rejecting his advances and returning to New York. Olsen's behavior reveals how with women, a shared object-relation brings agency by being publicly unrecognized, where with men, it merely brings objectification.

The conflict of objectification and desire finally reaches an apex when Olsen tepidly proposes marriage to Helga, an act that prompts Helga's desire for a return to the racial diversity of American that she had previously deplored. Olsen's proposition charts the lines of interracial racial desire as a transgression that themselves imagine contact with Helga as an international and sexual trespass. When Olsen explains that he "cannot hold out against the deliberate lure" of Helga" and that she "disturbs" him and "creeps into [his] brain," he positions Helga and her exoticism as a kind of invasive affront, disturbing his equilibrium (116). Nonetheless he looks at Helga as an "experience" for him, rather than an exchange of equals, which drive Helga into an expression, which Larsen leaves undescribed, that he responds to as if "repelled by something wild in her face and manner," descriptions which not only territorialize Helga as alien and dehumanize her simultaneously (117).

The logic here considers Helga's exoticism as a sexual trait, which Olsen makes more explicit when he claims: "You have the warm impulsive nature of the women of Africa, but, my lovely, you have, I fear, the soul of a prostitute. You sell yourself to the highest bidder. I should of course be happy that it is I" (117). When Helga rejects being positioned as a public object and

responds that she is "not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man. I don't at all care to be owned" she stops the marriage and realizes that the portrait Olsen had been painting was not "herself at all, but some disgusting sensual creature with her features" (119). In this inversion, Larsen turns the orientalist trappings that had "excited" and "incited" Helga into a burden because they do not direct onto an object of her desire, but rather a figure whose repetition of patriarchal power structures subverts Helga's queer subjectivity. Where Olsen had entrapped Helga through orientalist motifs, those motifs serve to restrict Helga because they tap into his power dynamic rather than into her understanding of orientalism's queer power of subversion.

Marriage and the Limits of Queer Escape

The dissolution of Helga's relationship with Olsen prompts a crisis in which Europe's promise of providing Helga an escape from racial interpolation collapses. The collapse hinges on the dismantling of orientalism's queer possibility to escape from the black female subjecthood policed and created by men. Subsequently, Helga wonders: "why couldn't she have two lives, or why couldn't she be satisfied in one place?" (123). She leaves for New York having rejected yet another man and returns with the thought not just of the kinship she finds in blackness but with lingering memories of the intimacy she felt with Anne. As much as Helga is troubled by a feeling of "incompleteness" and as much as she says that she is "homesick, not for America, but for Negroes" her feeling of homesickness also takes a queer shape: she expresses a "lurking formless and undesignated" feeling that itself raises to the surface of Helga's mind when she "found herself straying with increasing frequency to Anne's letter" before feeling that it was Harlem that she missed after all (122). As much as Helga rejects Olsen's orientalizing and exoticizing fantasy

of herself, she leaves because of a desire to return to an environment in which her latent desires can find similar vectors for expression.[48]

The novel seems somewhat equivocal at this point, suspended between nations, between races, and suspended between a desire for queerness and a hatred of heterosexual interpolation. Thus, when Helga speaks of the "certainty of the division of her life into two parts in two lands, into physical freedom in Europe and spiritual freedom in America" her geopolitical assessment registers these manifold modes of nonbelonging that become most clear when in the presence of demands to conform. Her politics, her kinship, and her desires remain divided between a feeling of belonging that "she had never truly valued" until "distance had shown its worth" (125). National nonbelonging and the failure of heterosexual relationships make Helga aware of "ties not only superficially entangled with mere outlines of features or color of skin. Deeper. Much deeper than either of those" (125). These deeper feelings have a queer association: even Helga's articulation of her sense of spiritual division coincides with a renewed proximity to Anne, who herself greats Helga's return with a certain diffidence.

The coincidence of a marriage and Anne's finding Helga a threat is expressed as an aesthetic problem. Larsen writes that Anne believes her husband views Helga "with that intellectual and aesthetic appreciation" and that "underneath that well managed section" there was a "more lawless place where she herself never hoped or desired to ender" a "vagrant primitive groping toward something shocking and frightening to the cold asceticism of his reason" (124). Larsen's interpolation of Anderson's views through Anne's point of view is telling because of the recurrent motifs it employs: the idea of emotional attachments that settle on Helga are "aesthetic" "lawless" and "underneath"—by viewing desire itself as "vagrant and

[48] Kimberley Roberts, "The Clothes Make the Woman,"115.

primitive," Anne projects onto Helga a desire that must be buried, repressed, or kept subtextual. Anne's paranoia and the triangulated desire that both Anne and Helga feel for Anderson invite the kind of queer paranoid reading that Sedgewick and others so powerfully perform. The fact of this closeting forecloses the possibilistic queer futures that Helga imagined could be possible when sharing intimate and private spaces with women. Instead, Helga feels that she has no mode of escape.

The queerness of these rejections meets its final triangulation following Anne's marriage to Anderson, with whom Helga eventually shares an erotic kiss that would at first blush appear to stabilize Helga's implicit heterosexual desire. The kiss happens non-volitionally, however, when "somehow, she never quite knew exactly how, [she fell] into the arms of Robert Anderson" (133). When upon this contact, Anderson "stooped and kissed her, a long kiss holding her close" Larsen approaches the contact as a kind of invasion, as Helga "fought against him with all her might" (133). When Larsen writes that "strangely, all power seemed to ebb away, and a long-hidden, half-understood desire welled up in her with the suddenness of a dream" Larsen appears to endorse a view of Helga's heterosexual desire. But even here, Larsen remains ambivalent: Helga's object of desire is never named, and Helga's seemingly long-desired contact with Anderson leaves her "consciously confused an embarrassed" ad how rapidly "everything seemed to have changed in the space of time which she knew to have been only a few seconds" (133).

The context of this kiss must again be understood in relation to Helga's feelings for and intimacy with Anne, who is once again at the periphery of a major inflection point in the novel. In this case, Larsen's purposeful lack of clarity and unspecified referents invite a reading in which Helga could either desire this erotic contact (a heterosexual reading) or is rather acting to hurt Anne, with whom she is no longer close, which would make Anne a target of Helga's

intimate contact with Anderson. Afterwards, Helga laments an intellectual connection with Anne beneath which is a concealed sense of desire and loss. Larsen writes:

> Helga smiled a little, understanding Anne's bitterness and hate, and a little of its cause. It was of a piece with that of those she so virulently hated. Fear. And then she sighed a little, for she regretted the waning of Ann's friendship. . . Not that she wasn't still grateful to Anne for many things. It was only that she had other things now. And there would, forever, be Robert Anderson between them. A nuisance. Shutting them off from their previous confident companionship and understanding. (127-28)

The rhetoric of this passage indicates a willful rewriting of Helga's sentiments and affections: it progresses as a series of aphorisms, of hopes that indicate the substantial impact that Helga feels with the loss of Anne. It suggests that while Dr. Anderson intercedes in a friendship, his marriage to Anne will be less than the intellectual connection shared with Helga. Helga seems to convince herself that she can act separately from Anne, and that Anderson is of no value. This diversion indicates a shared proximity to Anne that starkly contrasts the intellectual distance separating Helga from men in general. A queerness, then, is visible in the way men interrupt Helga's feelings of attachment, political or otherwise. This form of attachment stands in contrast to Helga's disavowal of marriage and the novel's harsh view of reproductive futurity. Her feelings of attachment establish the novel as expressing refusal not only through its racial and international politics, but also through a latent queer desire that would help heal Helga's feelings of isolation. In the end, Larsen suggests that the damage of Helga's many refusals could be mediated by a queer intimacy that the novel holds suspended on the horizon.

Though Anderson is at the center of a triangulation between Anne and Helga, this triangulation also occurs on global tropes of civic exclusion. Much as Irene was enticed and repulsed by foreignness, Helga's desire is a "lawless place" that is treated "aesthetically" but that remains subtextual and threatening. Helga's retreats from marriage and from heterosexual intimacy occur on these international grounds, and along her international sense of her liminality and nonbelonging. Helga's "fine contempt for the blatantly patriotic black Americans" for her turns to a kind of "feeling of insecurity, for which she could not account" that circulates in part around her failure to marry. Comparing her own romantic life to Anne's, Helga wonders why she hadn't married—and professes that "it would serve Anne right if she married a white man. But she knew in her soul that she wouldn't" (126). The circulation here, in which Helga's understanding of romance traces her international itinerary as a way of understanding her own racial nonbelonging, also circulates around Helga's failure to cement heterosexual attachments. The fact that women provide the triangulation point by which Helga understands her own romantic failings as well as her own racial difference establishes those women as queer contact points by which Helga's decisions and sense of self are oriented. That the erotic or sexual potential of these contact points remain occluded only serves to intensify their potential to erupt—and in erupting, to disrupt Helga's sense of oppositional politics. If Helga attaches to Anne, say, then she must attach to Anne's politics; by refusing Anne and by refusing the various men who would otherwise entrap Helga in the black bourgeois political world, Helga insists on the rejection of that political pole and the gendered requirements either would enact.

Since Larsen frames Helga as a political resistor, she rejects the motivations that drove Irene in *Passing* to detest Clare and to reject the offerings of a queer intimacy that Clare provided. The difference here is that Anne, however bourgeois she might be, offers Helga some

kind of racial empathy that Clare has herself rejected. Nonetheless, Helga disavows the political system in which Anne and Mr. Anderson have invested—and instead elopes with the evangelical preacher, Mr. Greene, with whom she moves to Florida. The novel ends on a decidedly heterosexual note—but one devoid of joy or pleasure, one that instead seems the ultimate abjection, one that erases the more subversive object attachments Helga felt at the novel's beginning. In a dramatic farewell to Helga, Larsen writes that, after a long illness: "hardly had she left her bed and become able to walk again without pain, hardly had the children returned from the homes of the neighbors, when she began to have her fifth child" (162). The writing and abrupt ending are brutal: since Helga's previous pregnancy was almost fatal, since Helga began to feel "disgust" with her husband and "shame . . . at every thought of her marriage," once again deciding "to leave" the husband who for her is now "hated," Larsen levels a critique that condemns heteronormativity and reproductive futurity for their psychological damage (162).

Helga at this point sees her conversion as a false disavowal of her previous principles. She realizes that this most American form of belonging is a form of literal and figurative territorialization that claims her body, her futurity, her gender, sexuality, and desire, all within the putative function of reproduction and her capacity to contribute to the expanse of the population of her community. Helga only stays for an "immediate present" despite the "oppression and degradation that her life had become" because she is "too weak, too sick" (161). Moreover, Helga's final pregnancy is a brutal psychological assessment of the way her decisions are predicated on the psychological damage inflicted by the requirements of an ideological identitarian system that is inimical to Helga's multiple ways of belonging—her desire to be urban, cultivated, transnational, between black and white, queer and straight. These requirements situate and justify Helga's final disavowal of marriage and the novel's harsh view of

reproductive futurity. Her feelings of attachment establish the novel as expressing refusal not only through its racial and international politics, but also through a latent queer desire that would help heal Helga's feelings of isolation. In the end, Larsen suggests that the damage of Helga's many refusals could be mediated by a queer intimacy that the novel holds suspended on the horizon, impossibly out of reach, but safe in the realm of imagination.

Possibilities of Being

Recovering a positive message from Larsen's overwhelmingly negative novels, in the end, proves difficult. The novels are indisputably and abortively negative: *Quicksand* completes with Helga Crane in a deep depression and at the edge of death from her unwanted fifth pregnancy, longing to escape the South. In the end, Helga ultimately loses all privacy and is completely subsumed by the modes of black female subjectivity that are permissible in the U.S. public sphere. Without the possibility of her imagined transcendent queerness being recognized in public life, Helga effectively abandons the whole enterprise and submits to abjection. When *Passing* ends by suggesting that Irene is responsible for Clare Kendry's death, Larsen depicts the execution of the one prospect of realized queer expression that Irene could have experienced. Both these novels portray women limited by identifications that they adopted in an effort to find respite in a world that categorized them unwillingly. Both novels show the damage of limited identifications—to be black, to be a woman, to be queer. They end with fatalism and failure, rather than the radical promise of utopian hope. Even when reaching towards an ephemeral otherness that is neither named nor bordered, the novels do so with limits—by containing those ephemeral spaces to Helga and Irene's fantasies of private space and of objects outside of objectification. Though the novels break those molds by suggesting a queer power in what they

refuse, they nonetheless hold the possibility of a life outside the violent strictures of the heterosexual, patriarchal, and white supremacist order of America in a distinct remove.

By the time of Larsen's writing, U.S. authors were increasingly aware of their global impact. During the Harlem Renaissance, the prospect of building a global community, especially for black people, held a utopian draw that was especially enticing for the Renaissance's gay male writers. Global reach can be colonialist and violent in ways that reinforce the degeneration of sexual deviance, however, as Larsen helps to make clear. In the case of the queer Renaissance, to reach to the globe also meant to diminish the place of women—to fragment a global utopia along the lines of gender that queer figures had hoped to bring into closer contact. Larsen explores these fractures and forms of global identity, violence, and non-belonging. Her negative politics shows that a mode of political engagement must be sought through refusal, by rejecting the identities and loci of power of her present day. Larsen's project works across the many categories of power that limit political expression: its queer diasporic and international reach show how alien it is to be binary, to identify as being black or queer, as local, national, or global. Even while the refusal of Larsen's work to arrive at a form of identification leaves the future undescribed and indefinite, it shows the necessity of collective action outside of existing modes of political affiliation. As such, the prospects of a radical rupture with the power structures that leave black queer women outside of the utopian imaginary is for Larsen the start of a path to justice. As her novels indicate when examined together, that road can be charted on queer pathways of alliance that, if acknowledged, might broker the way towards identifications that are not either/or, but insistently multiple.

Coda

James Baldwin and Discovering Love Beyond the Nation

> *They strike one, above all, as giving no account of themselves in any terms already consecrated by human use; to this inarticulate state they probably form, collectively, the most unprecedented of monuments; abysmal the mysteries of what they think, what they feel, what they want, what they suppose themselves to be saying.*[1]
> — Henry James, Preface to the New York Editions

In his 1959 essay "The Discovery of What it Means to Be an American," James Baldwin gestures to a longer genealogy of queer expatriation, one that reaches back to the opening of this project. Published two years after returning from a long period in France, Baldwin retraces the conflicted reflections of Henry James on expatriating to England. Beginning with James' claim that "it is a complex fate to be an American," Baldwin observes that the American expatriate writing from abroad learns "just how complex this fate is" in unexpected ways.[2] The gesture to James at the essay's opening is surprising not because of the queerness James and Baldwin shared, but because of what they didn't. In a concrete difference from James, Baldwin wished to escape "the fury of the color problem here," and believed that Europe offered a place to re-frame what his Americanness meant. Yet, on arriving in France, he felt, to his "astonishment, to be as American as any Texas G.I."[3] The wish to look beyond the presumptions of living in the shadow

[1] Henry James, "Preface," *Lady Barbarina, The Siege of London, An International Episode, and Other Tales* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1908), xvi.

[2] James Baldwin, "The Discovery of What It Means To Be an American," *Collected Essays*, (New York: Library of America, 1998), 137.

[3] Ibid., 137.

of American racism shifted; so did Baldwin's professed desire "to find out in what way the *specialness* of my experience could be made to connect me with other people instead of dividing me from them."[4] The exact characteristics of that specialness Baldwin left obscure.

In the context of 1959, at least one dimension of Baldwin's specialness seems clear, and it lived in the duality of Baldwin's alienated experience as both queer and black. That intersection was particularly fraught at the end of the 1950s. In the interlude between his expatriation and his return, Baldwin had written *Giovanni's Room*, outing himself to the world in a way that his editors expected to result in the ruin of his literary career.[5] Meanwhile, he returned to a Civil Rights movement unwelcoming to his open sexuality. While gay men like Baldwin and civil rights organizer Bayard Rustin played a vital role in one of the most important political movements of the twentieth century, they were expected to minimize the visibility of their sexual identity.[6] Despite these negative attitudes to Baldwin's self-declaration, *Giovanni's Room* became a bestseller, and his peripheral position as a commentator on the Civil Rights movement gave him a unique voice. And yet, one particular development while he was abroad in France stood out in Baldwin's own mind, a development that shaped his reflections on an unstable moment for racial and sexual civil rights: having fallen in love. Baldwin writes: "I think—I know—that my story would be a very different one if love had not forced me to deal with myself. It began to pry open for me the trap of color, for people do not fall in love according to

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[4] Ibid., 137.

[5] William Weatherby recounts the initial reception and its complications after the novel's initial publication in London and its subsequent release in the U.S. William Weatherby, *James Baldwin: An Artist on Fire* (New York: Dell, 1989), esp. 118-19.

[6] For an overview of Baldwin's experience of queer otherness in the African American community, see Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), esp. 230-32.

their color."[7] Beyond leaving the nation, beyond living on the periphery of a community at home skeptical of his sexuality, Baldwin gained insight on his otherwise separate identifications in the experience of love he found elsewhere.

The possibility born of falling in love and seeing the limits of the narrow categories of being that we are afforded at home ultimately motivates *Giovanni's Room*. But Baldwin's most singularly-focused exploration of gay life does not celebrate the enabling power of love. Instead, the novel focuses on the enduring damage of marginalization and exclusion, and the causes of that damage. Baldwin picked a perhaps unusual object for his study: he narrates from the point of view of David, a white American expatriate in Paris, and his abortive love affair with Giovanni, an immigrant from Italy.[8] The novel opens with David's reflection on his destructive self-hatred and the pending execution of Giovanni, who had been accused of murdering the owner of the bar where he and David met. Focusing on their meeting in the gay district of Saint-Germain in Paris, Baldwin embeds readers in David's thoughts and memories in a distinctly European setting. Feeling adrift outside of his nation and because of his ambivalence towards his fiancée, Hella, David is wrought by indecision over two attachments: one indexing the familiarity of American normativity in Hella, the other offering an unknown, foreign future through Giovanni.

As Baldwin explained in a letter, his novel does not concern homosexuality in a vacuum; it also limns the consequences of the "loneliness and insecurity" of the white imagination.[9] It is

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[7] James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 23.

[8] Baldwin suggested in an interview that he wanted to escape the confines of a race novel. See Baldwin, James, *Conversations with James Baldwin*, ed. Fred L. Standley and Louise H. Pratt (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 1989), 290-91.

[9] Qtd. in David Adams Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, (New York: H. Holt and Co, 1995), 127. For additional perspectives on Baldwin's approach to race in *Giovanni's Room*, see Jürgen E. Grandt, "Into a Darker Past: James Baldwin's 'Giovanni's Room' and the Anxiety of Authenticity," *College Language Association Journal* 54, no. 3 (2011): 268–93; Aliyyah I. Abur-Rahman, "'Simply a Menaced

with the way that Baldwin exposes the enduring damage of national history, whiteness, and masculinity that I wish to conclude. For, where many of the writers explored so far illustrate how civic structures contribute to marginalization, Baldwin takes another track: he directly faces the psychological aftermath and unequal distribution of histories of sexual, racial, and gendered marginalization. The way Baldwin approaches queerness and race in the novel lies here: in examining what it means for a white subject to fear the loss of the rights and privileges afforded to white men, especially in the U.S. For David, that loss appears a tragedy—but, as the novel discovers, the greater loss is adherence to a power structure that exists to subordinate any deviation from it. To bridge the ways in which those structures have contributed to intractable disunion in the U.S. meant forming coalitions across lines separating racial, sexual, and gendered experiences of exclusion. The realizations necessary for such coalition building—imagined and yet ultimately severely limited in the trajectory drawn by this project— are what Baldwin shows the imperative of confronting.

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From the start of *Giovanni's Room*, the entanglement of sexuality, nationality, and race, shapes David's narration of the past that brought to him his lover, Giovanni. As David reflects on his life, he admits that he had not discovered queerness in France, but as a teenager in Brooklyn. That backstory originates from a youthful sexual encounter that David refuses to contend with until after Giovanni's conviction for murder. Remembering "one particular lie among the many lies I've told, told, lived, and believed," David laments that he never shared his prior sexual encounter with a boy before Giovanni (6). Even in this youthful sexual transgression, Baldwin

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Boy': Analogizing Color, Undoing Dominance in James Baldwin's 'Giovani's Room,'" *African American Review* 41, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 477–86; and, James Polchin, "The Baldwin of Giovanni's Room," *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 21, no. 6 (2014): 31–33.

indexes America's deepest racial paranoia. After David describes himself as "a face you may have seen many times" reminiscent of the "ancestors [who] conquered a continent," Baldwin offers something vaguely different in David's first lover: he describes Joey, David's friend from Brooklyn, as "a very nice boy, too, very quick and dark, and always laughing" (3, 6). David later recalls how "the idea that such a person *could* have been my best friend was proof of some horrifying taint in me" (6). This taint, when seen in light of David's whiteness and blondness, flattens Joey's darkness and sexual attractiveness into a single fear.

When the two have sex, that difference falls away. David writes that he believed "a lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love" (8). In his recollection, the novelty of their experience takes the two out of time, removing them from the biases that frame David and Joey distinctly. Their act of love is quickly overridden by a feeling of alienation that ricochets across the rest of David's life. Describing Joey after their only night of lovemaking, David remembers how "his body was brown, was sweaty, the most beautiful creation I had ever seen"; and yet he becomes "suddenly afraid" of Joey's innocence. The fear seems to come from an indistinct outside: David reports that "it was borne in on me: *But Joey is a boy*" (9). When imagining a public view of their intimacy, David's love is replaced with fear and the sense of the "black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood" (9). Swirling around the discovery of feelings that David cannot account for are competing desires and the acknowledgment of a difference that registers through the otherness of the brown body. The taboo of sameness that the two have chosen to break becomes visible through what differentiates David from Joey.

It is contact with two differences marginalized in the U.S.—queerness and race—from which David takes flight. But in that flight, he returns to the same question through Giovanni.

Giovanni mirrors and intensifies the characteristics that had caused David to fear Joey. Upon their first meeting, David recalls how Giovanni "stood insolent and dark and leonine . . . as though his station were a promontory and we were the sea" (28). What David seems to find in Giovanni is a kind of stability and self-assuredness unavailable to David in his flight from America and his avoidance of his fiancée, Hella. Once again, David recounts the movement of his feelings from an initial ease to a feeling of public shame. As they talk, David realizes that "he is quite happy to be talking with [Giovanni] and this realization made [him] shy," as he, for once, enters a kind of vulnerability and openness, a requited intimacy (32). And yet, when David realizes he risks exposing pleasure in being witnessed by the crowd at the bar, he retreats, much as he had abandoned Joey. Realizing that the crowd "had witnessed a beginning," David feels that it was he who "was in the zoo, and they were watching" (38). For David, the greatest fear seems to be to lose the power, the authority, the security of his normativity. Even though David moves into Giovanni's apartment and they pass a month together in intimacy and happiness, that fear persists. To become the object of scrutiny where previously he could scrutinize, as a presumably heterosexual white man, represents a fundamental disorder of the very powers to which he feels entitled, to which he feels owed.[10]

"Do you know *why* you want to get away from me?" Giovanni asks when David attempts to end their affair, abandon Giovanni, and resume his relationship with his fiancée, Hella (141). David responds, in a cutting dismissal, "what kind of life can two men have together anyway?"

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[10] In an interview later in life, Baldwin glosses what he aimed to address in David's queerness and whiteness. When asked about the experience of white gay men, Baldwin responded: "I think white gay people feel cheated because they were born, in principle, in a society in which they were supposed to be safe. . . . Their reaction seems to me in direct proportion to their sense of feeling cheated of the advantages which accrue to white people in a white society." David seems to anticipate what Baldwin articulates here. James Baldwin and Quincy Troupe, *James Baldwin: The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2014), 67.

(142). When Giovanni replies, "You are the one who keeps talking about *what* I want. But I have only been talking about *who* I want," Giovanni gets at the heart of David's limited imagination: it is impossible for David to imagine a life that the two could share in public, so he rejects the possibility out of hand. That is why David, in the few times that he admits his happiness with Giovanni, describes their shared time in his room as if it is "beneath the sea," separated from the world at large, disconnected from its responsibilities and legacies.

And yet, Giovanni knows what David does not: that the "mythology of your country"—the heteronormative, commercial promise of reproduction and homeownership—does not amount to a fully lived experience (142). Giovanni's skepticism of David's rejection situates the core problem of the novel: that the destructive narrative of American masculinity, and all the whiteness associated with it, has become a mask that only hides the damage of U.S. history from Americans themselves. Much earlier in the novel, David opines in his narrative voice that he had wandered to Europe because, "as we say in America, I wanted to find myself" (21). And yet, David admits, "I think I knew, at the bottom of my heart, exactly what I was doing when I took the boat for France" (21). That unexamined territory of the mind that David excavates too late is the place requiring the most heightened scrutiny, a scrutiny that David, like the nation he left, refuses. At the novel's end, when David destroys a letter from his remaining acquaintance in Paris on the morning of Giovanni's execution, he attempts to escape his recent past once more; he watches the pieces of the letter "dancing in the wind, watching the wind carry them away" only to find that "as I turn and begin walking [away], the wind blows some of them back on me" (169). The inevitability of that return provides a parable for the state of the union that the U.S. in its mythology aims to perfect.

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The imperative for exploring David's internalized homophobia and biases became even more clear to Baldwin upon viewing the Civil Rights conflicts consuming the United States in person. Having returned, as his biographer notes, Baldwin felt both "determined to avoid Giovanni's fate" but insistent that he should "do what he could to turn white America away" from the self-destruction David wrought by refusing to confront the legacy of his inheritance as a white American.[11] When Baldwin travelled in the South subsequently, the depth of the intersection of white sexual repression and racial aggression became only more clear: the anger targeted at black men and in violent public display showed what Baldwin described as the "devastating effect" of American private life on people of color, who became the scapegoat for the failures of the white imagination.[12] The relations between racial and sexual marginalization to the intoxicating power of white masculinity, in Baldwin's assessment, must be faced directly for the nation to transcend its limitations and history. That tension simmers through insights about the importance of the care and the love lost in *Giovanni's Room*.

In some respects, however, Baldwin's own critique fail in the same ways as the failures Baldwin illustrates through David. For one, Baldwin's fiction neglects to answer Nella Larsen's call for an imaginary that has a place for black queer women. Here, Baldwin's exploration of David's inability to escape the prejudices of whiteness and masculinity that shaped him acts as a reminder of the limits of Baldwin's own consciousness when it came to gender. While succeeding in parsing out how the legacies of neutral whiteness, masculinity, and compulsory heterosexuality intersect to limit the queer imaginary, the gendering of that imaginary fades to

[11] David Adams Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, (New York: H. Holt and Co, 1995), 128.

[12] Qtd. in Leeming, *Biography,* 128.

the background.[13] Even in the horizon that Baldwin failed to see, the larger point rings true: to refuse engagement with the structures that shape our history and lived experiences, as David and indeed so many Americans do, means their indefinite repetition and their compounding harm.

That refusal has a history in fiction that queer authors have been trying to tell for a long time. When asked late in his life why Baldwin turned to Henry James so often, Baldwin replied that he and James shared a central theme: "the failure of Americans to see through to the reality of others."[14] It was, as Baldwin believed James showed in his often-evasive fiction, that there are consequences for avoiding American history; that to live life truthfully and fully "costs something."[15] From Henry James, writing *The Bostonians* from abroad, and Nella Larsen, writing in the shadow of her own international travels and Danish heritage, the queer longing for a world beyond exclusion and alienation at home proved as fraught as it did enticing. Where these authors traced the complications of queer nonbelonging, James Baldwin picked up the mantle, but made it not so much a place as a region of the mind. But even the region of Baldwin's mind, so often prophetic in its analyses of American history and the American psyche, is just the beginning of a deeper analysis, and a deeper collective imaginary.

It's an imaginary that, as Audre Lorde reminded Baldwin, must be written by those at the margins for those at the margins. As Lorde put it, "We have to redefine ourselves for each other because no matter what the underpinnings of the distortion are, the fact remains that we have

[13] On Baldwin's limits when it comes to imagining queer women, see Matt Brim, *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014), esp. 156.

[14] Qtd. in Leeming, *Biography*, 255.

[15] Ibid., 255.

absorbed it."[16] Only when facing the intersecting distortions and histories of racism, sexism, and homophobia might Americans combat their own divisions and form coalitions beyond black/white, queer/normative binaries. In reaching back to the irresolution of those before him, Baldwin charts the experience available through a queer genealogy, but also what can be learned from the experiences not yet connected to that genealogy. In the stories left untold, the legacy of queer imaginative failures as much as queer successes shapes how one confronts the as-yet unimagined civil rights struggles to come. In a time when we look to the law as a bulwark for defending hard-won rights in the face of hostility, it is important to remember not just that citizenship, belonging, and rights carry baggage, but in what ways and with what histories. In the impetus to engage these terms that Baldwin renewed from his predecessors, we might find not only what is left to face, but motivation to continue.

[16] See Baldwin, James and Audre Lorde, "Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde," *Essence*, December 1984, 129-130.

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