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Kinless or Queer:
Racial Antagonism and Nonnormative Sexuality in Contemporary African American Literature

DISSERTATION

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation argues that black sexuality is structurally nonnormative *a priori*, not contingently upon infraction. Due to the kinlessness of slavery, the violence of lynch sexuality, and the pathologization of the black family, black sexuality does not operate under the temporal model of normativity described by queer theory. Drawing on contemporary black critical theory and theories of slavery, my project places the normativity of civil society in the context of the constitutive exclusion of black political ontology, and stages the encounter between these conversations in works of contemporary African American literature.

Preface

In the neo-slave narrative *Oxherding Tale*, Charles Johnson describes the life of a slave, Andrew Hawkins, who falls in love with a fellow slave, Minty, and vows to earn his own freedom and then hers. His master, apparently supporting his plan, hires him out to the nearby plantation of Flo Hatfield—but he soon discovers himself to be her sexual servant and plaything rather than a wage-earning worker. The narrative reaches a sort of deformed closure when, having passed as a white man to escape slavery and married a white woman, Andrew finds Minty for sale, bearing all the marks of a life of horrific enslavement, and buys her just before she dies of a wasting disease. In the midst of his flight from Flo Hatfield's plantation, he laments,

> But worse than all this, I had lost Minty. When I tell you that my urgency for freedom came from my desire to see Minty free, that my well-being depended largely upon hers, you will not believe me. You are going to say that at twenty Andrew Hawkins was infatuated or, like most men, in love with the idea of love, or perhaps propelled by romance. None of that would be true. The view from the quarters changes everything, even love—especially love—and in ways not commonly admitted. (101)

Andrew imagines a public made up of readers who insist upon a normative model of love and romance. This imagined public ascribes certain heternormative attitudes to youth ("at twenty") and masculinity ("like most men"). But Andrew defies this model of normativity by saying that "[t]he view from the quarters changes everything." By intertwining the longing for freedom with his desire for Minty, Andrew argues that slavery places him in a categorically nonnormative relation to the systems of love, romance, and kinship that his imagined readership—implicitly constructed as not including his fellow slaves—would impose. As Arlene Keizer writes, "The

question of why Johnson uses American slavery as the site of his philosophical meditations on blackness is an appropriate one to ask of a writer whose use of anachronism reveals his strong interest in black ontology in the present" (49). Given the postmodern, meta-fictional aspects of the novel, Andrew's audience can be understood as postmodern themselves. What does "the view from the quarters" look like to a twentieth-century reader, and what does it reveal about black ontology in the present?

In Western modernity, the power of normativity[1] to generate, describe, and regulate sexual relations between members of civil society supersedes the formerly dominant juridical mechanisms for doing so. This shift has been rigorously theorized by Michel Foucault and the queer theorists who emerged as his followers. Simultaneously, contradictorily, and inextricably, however, the political ontology of blackness was constituted in a way that relied upon fundamentally sexual structures—kinlessness; miscegenation, lynching, and the phobic encounter between the black man and the white woman; racial science based in comparative anatomy, physiology, and eugenics—without including blackness in the fold of sexual normativity that totalizingly enveloped the sexuality of civil society. This political ontology has been theorized by Orlando Patterson, Frantz Fanon, Hortense Spillers, and others building upon their work. By placing the normativity of civil society in the context of the constitutive exclusion of black political ontology, and staging the encounter between these conversations in works of contemporary literature by Toni Morrison, Robert O'Hara, James Baldwin, Chester Himes,

[1] By "normativity," I do not mean the power to coerce conformity to the norm, but rather the creation of the categories of normal and abnormal themselves and their regulatory frameworks, a process which, as Foucault describes, proliferates nonnormative sexualities as well as normative ones.

[2] The term "reproductive futurity" comes from *No Future*, in which Edelman argues that the figure of "the Child" represents futurity in Western political discourse. While my analysis of contemporary literature supports that assertion, it also implicitly challenges his further argument that queers have a privileged role as the most significant threat to futurity; Edelman does not adequately consider how race affects Western representations of reproduction and futurity.

Amiri Baraka, Audre Lorde, and Ann Allen Shockley, this dissertation argues that the *a priori* nonnormativity of sexuality associated with black political ontology is importantly distinct from the contingent nonnormativity of sexualities available to members of civil society.

The texts I analyze, although all written in the contemporary era, are either set in or draw upon the symbolic and political structures of three different historical epochs: the era of slavery, characterized by black kinlessness and lack of futurity; post-Reconstruction, characterized by lynch sexuality; and the contemporary era, characterized by ongoing pathologization of black kinship and *a priori* exclusion from normativity. I draw on the work of theorists of black ontology to describe the categorical nonnormativity of black sexuality in these eras. I use Orlando Patterson's formulation of social death and Hortense Spillers's description of the ungendering of chattel to analyze neo-slave narratives. Frantz Fanon and David Marriott's descriptions of the phobic interracial sexual encounter inform my reading of contemporary literature that embodies the psychic and political structures of lynch sexuality. Saidiya Hartman's analysis of the double edge of performances of desire and volition and David Marriott's analysis of the "absent black father" frame my discussion of the ongoing pathologization and nonnormativity of black kinship in the contemporary era.

These theorists insist that the *a priori* association between blackness and nonnormative sexuality is fundamental to the constitution of the political ontology of blackness in Western modernity, and by extension, fundamental to the political ontology of civil society that is founded upon its constitutive exclusion. And yet, most models of normativity developed by queer theorists view nonnormativity as a contingent, performative infraction of the norm rather than as a preclusion, and models of intersectionality, which have great potential for showing precisely how race and sexuality interact to produce this preclusion, in practice often obscure the

genealogical differences between infraction and preclusion by equating or analogizing different nonnormative formations. This dissertation seeks to stage the encounter between these theoretical conversations and their literary counterparts.

My methodology presupposes that literary works have the potential to distill a representation of structural antagonisms in political ontology that supersedes the miscellany of everyday experience. Therefore it is reminiscent of Fredric Jameson's Marxist reading practice, introduced in *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson argues that texts can be read at three levels of abstraction: the individual, the social, and the historical. At the individual level, a text is not simply a passive record of random experience, but rather a "symbolic act, whereby real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm" (79). At the second level, "individual phenomena are revealed as social facts and institutions […] at the moment in which the organizing categories of analysis become those of social class" (83). The text is understood as one iteration, *parole*, within the *langue* of class discourse. Finally, at the third level of abstraction, the antagonism between the dominant and working classes in the text's contemporary social horizon is put into the historical context of the shifting modes of production that generate and sustain class antagonism in the first place. At this level the "ideology of form" can be read in such a way that "generic specification and description can, in a given historical text, be transformed into the detection of a host of distinct generic messages—some of them objectified survivals from older modes of cultural production, some anticipatory, but all together projecting a formal conjuncture through which the 'conjuncture' of coexisting modes of production at a given historical moment can be detected and allegorically articulated" (99). My methodology corresponds to Jameson's in its endeavor to read texts as

socially symbolic acts that can reveal structural antagonisms through representing the ideal forms of ideology in political allegory.

However, I differ from Jameson in two ways. Firstly, Jameson reduces all antagonisms to a dichotomous class struggle, while I, following Frank Wilderson, argue that the struggle between the working class and the dominant class is a conflict *within* civil society, whose resolution would leave the structural antagonism between civil society and the political ontology of blackness unaltered. Therefore, I am interested in the texts' representation of the structural antagonism between civil society and the political ontology of blackness, rather than between classes as defined by power over the modes of production.

Secondly, I do not find the texts I analyze to be solely tools to resolve conflicts in service of the hegemonic ideology. In other words, I am interested in their political consciousness as much as their political unconscious. In Jameson's reading, texts can reveal structural antagonisms only symptomatically, through aporia and antinomy (82); oppositional voices must undergo "restoration or artificial reconstruction" because they have been "stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, [their] own voices scattered to the winds, or reappropriated in their turn by the hegemonic culture" (85). Although stifling, silencing, marginalization, and reappropriation are certainly part of the arsenal of antiblackness, I find that the authors of contemporary literature I analyze nevertheless openly theorize racial antagonism. Therefore, following Barbara Christian in "The Race for Theory," I view them as theorists of political ontology who use representation, mimesis, symbolism, and narrative craft as methodologies of their argumentation. I proceed by putting their political allegories of racial antagonism into conversation with theories of political ontology and non/normative sexuality.

While I do occasionally read symptomatically or simply agnostically with regard to authorial intent, the reader will often find me claiming that the authors I analyze have in fact *intentionally* included a representation or allegory of racial antagonisms in their texts. While I have fully absorbed the lessons of new criticism and deconstruction about the intent of an author, this claim matters to me because I want to re-orient the critical conversation about these texts from a critique of representation to a critique of materiality and violence. For example, if one assumes—as most of her critics do—that Ann Allen Shockley unconsciously allows a depiction of racial antagonism to slip undetected into *Loving Her* and corrupt its ostensibly raceless, classless, lesbian feminist vision, the logical conclusion is that her representation is at fault. The remedy is to produce new, better representations of black lesbians. In contrast, if we assume that she chooses to incorporate an allegory of these antagonisms deliberately, in order to educate her audience about their nature, then we can join her in attempting to diagnose problems in the larger material and political spheres. The focus on critiquing representations instead of the material realities they allegorize, exhibited by many of Shockley's critics, may result in a revolution of inspiring representations of possible lives, and very little tangible alteration in the material realities of racialized existence in America. I do not claim to know the mind of Ann Allen Shockley with anything approaching certainty, but I do know that how we conceive of her orientation toward her own text changes *our* reception of its content, and in turn changes the orientation of the critique her text elicits: considering her allegory to be intentional reorients our critique away from her representation and toward the reality which it allegorizes.

I find it remarkable how frequently black American authors of different periods, regions, classes, political outlooks, sexes, and sexualities either explicitly state framework or take as an assumption the *a priori* exclusion of black sexuality from normativity and therefore the

constitutive role of sexuality in black political ontology. Some feminist and queer theorists may lack the vocabulary to describe this structure, preferring a model of space—positionality, point of view—over one of time—a description that, by emphasizing temporality, could account for different processes and origins of nonnormativity. But black authors of fiction, drama, poetry, and memoir—as much as their projects, aesthetics, and commitments diverge in every other respect—repeatedly insist and allegorize that the categorical nonnormativity of black sexuality is importantly different from the model of punishment-contingent-on-infraction that disciplines members of civil society. As I move through the chapters of this dissertation, I hope to both prove this consistency itself, and to examine different aspects, expressions, and implications of this categorical nonnormativity.

Chapter One analyzes the roots of blackness's categorical exclusion from sexual normativity in the kinlessness of slavery by examining two contemporary works of literature that re-inhabit the world of American chattel slavery. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the kinlessness of slavery is represented as a traumatic experience of preclusion from normative sexuality. The central conflict of the novel occurs between Paul D, who represents participation in normative kinship structures that was denied to slaves, and Beloved, who represents the natal alienation that characterized slavery and its lasting destructiveness in the postbellum black psyche. To represent the perversity of Sethe's enthrallment to the trauma of past kinlessness, all nature of nonnormative sexualities are associated with Beloved's influence on other characters, including homoeroticism, incest, rape, prostitution, bestiality, and necrophilia. Robert O'Hara's play *Insurrection* represents an effort to imagine the existence of a queer slave, but encounters and thus reveals the obstacles to such a project posed by the ontological limits of the two identities.

While the trajectories of the queer and the slave literally intersect as they fly through space and time in O'Hara's time-traveling play, the ontological limits of the two identities require that they be embodied in two different characters whose meeting can occur only a fantastic genre, whose interaction exhibits parallelisms of representation but radical incommensurabilities of specific experience.

Chapter Two moves forward in historical setting and backward in literary time, to argue, through a reading of James Baldwin's depiction of white queerness in *Giovanni's Room*, that the common theoretical description of queerness as failure to conform implicitly imagines queerness as a temporal process of punishment contingent upon infraction (even when the authors clearly understand this process to be synchronic, repetitive, or constantly performed) that does not account for the *a priori* exclusion of the ontology of blackness from normative sexuality. The process implicit in queerness-as-failure is this: the norm preexists the individual subject; the subject is required to live up to/embody/perform the norm; the subject fails to adequately do so; the subject is found to be queer; the subject is punished accordingly. In *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin shows how the pressures of normative sexuality bear upon a queer white American in France. Contrary to the prevalent intersectional interpretation that sees David's experience as a queer man as an analogy for black positionality, I argue that Baldwin makes David, his most iconically queer protagonist, white precisely to show that the normative structures of sexuality that totalizingly confine the white subject leave black structural positionality by the wayside.

Chapters Three and Four examine interracial sexuality. Chapter Three reads depictions of sexuality between black men and white women in Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*. In these texts, the political ontology of blackness is defined by the persistence of the psychic, sexual, and political structures of lynch sexuality: a dual prohibition

against killing white men and having sex with white women. Such a prohibition cannot help but automatically generate the desire for its own transgression, forcing individuals to place themselves in relation to it no matter what their personal desires may be, making it impossible for the black man to negotiate a normative orientation toward interracial sexuality. This prohibition, which purports to separate and police the boundaries between already discrete races, and its necessary transgression actually instantiate the very categories of race themselves, at every level of abstraction. The texts examined in this chapter demonstrate that the internalization of this prohibition in the black male psyche creates a simultaneous hyperawareness and shattering of the corporeal schema, described by Fanon as the black man's negrophobic reaction to himself caused by interracial encounters. They also demonstrate the role of miscegenation in incurring the violence of lynching that structures the relationship between black and non-black political ontology. They demonstrate that even if a physical lynching never materializes, the imputation of lust for white women and the threat of retaliatory violence from white men are always present elements in the structures of libidinal and political economy.

Chapter Four points out that as depictions of interracial sexuality between black men and white women became increasingly common as a statement of freedom or power after the 1960s, formerly common literary depictions of interracial sexuality between black women and white men—excluding novels set during slavery—became correspondingly rare. Instead, black lesbian texts depict interracial sexuality between black and white women. These texts, such as Audre Lorde's memoir *Zami* and Ann Allen Shockley's novel *Loving Her*, represent identities at the intersection of black, female, lesbian, and interracial. They are often read as exemplars of the theory of intersectionality. This chapter argues that in *Zami*, Lorde demonstrates the power and pitfalls of intersectional analysis, arguing that while it does compare identities in leveling ways

that lead to deceptively analogizing models like the "house of difference," it is best read for the ways that it insists upon structural differences between blackness and other identities. In *Loving Her*, Shockley juxtaposes, rather than parallels, queer and black relations to sexuality through themes of futurity and inheritance.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that queer theory needs to reckon with the *a priori* nonnormativity of blackness. This does not mean fitting blackness into queer theory's preexisting frameworks, declaring that black *is* queer and stopping there, or uncritically proposing a coalition of nonnormative sexualities without examining the genealogies and violences that differently created them. Queer theory needs a more precise analytic framework for describing these genealogies and violences. If queer theory has been productive in analyzing kinship regimes and the violence of being excluded from them for infractions against normativity, it must also reckon with the very different violence of never being expected or even permitted to conform to kinship norms in the first place—that is, the violence of kinlessness.

Orlando Patterson ends the final chapter of *Slavery and Social Death* with a question to which my mind relentlessly returns. Having shown the constitutive role of slavery in birthing the concept of freedom so beloved in the modern West; having shown that a desire for freedom (rather than, say, community connection or personal accomplishment) is nonsensical in the absence of an example or threat of abject unfreedom; having shown that slaves and freedmen were "the first men and women to struggle for freedom, the first to think of themselves as free in the only meaningful sense of the term," he asks, "We arrive then at a strange and bewildering enigma: are we to esteem slavery for what it has wrought, or must we challenge our conception of freedom and the value we place upon it?" (342). This question is essentially rhetorical, as it is

difficult to picture Patterson earnestly esteeming slavery, yet the blankness of the rest of the page bespeaks the difficulty of actually imagining the beginning of the project of "challeng[ing] our conception of freedom and the value we place upon it." And as with freedom, I would add, so with sexuality. This is what Johnson's protagonist Andrew means when he says his "urgency for freedom came from [his] desire to see Minty free" (101). Modern sexuality came into the world in the upheavals of the transatlantic slave trade and its afterlife. Slaves were the first to struggle for and be violently denied the right to be normative in sex and kinship; their descendants continue to struggle against involuntary, categorical nonnormativity. Ironically, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the concept of freedom animates many of the most impassioned attacks on the system of sexual normativity from those *forced* to conform to it—without any recognition that freedom and sexuality are both concepts parasitic upon the lives of those categorically *excluded* from aspiring to conform to sexual normativity. In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Foucault notes that in addition to instantiating a system of compulsory normativity, the invention of sexuality also proliferated possible identities, pleasures, and powers for those within its purview. The exclusion of blackness was constitutive of this proliferation. To echo Patterson, are we to esteem antiblackness for what it has wrought, or must we challenge our conception of sexuality and the value we place upon it?

Chapter One:

Kinless or Queer: The Unthinkable Queer Slave in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Robert O'Hara's *Insurrection: Holding History*

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* and Robert O'Hara's play *Insurrection: Holding History* reinhabit the world of American chattel slavery in order to supplement the historian's record with an imaginative exploration of the experience of the enslaved. In these intimate reinhabitations, sexuality is foregrounded for its relationship to the fundamental conditions of enslavement: preclusion from legally recognized and protected kinship bonds and the inability to generate reproductive futurity.[2] The two authors represent sexuality very differently, to very different ends. Morrison deploys nonnormative sexuality in the character Beloved to represent the perversions of slavery from which the postbellum black psyche must recover in the service of attaining heteronormative patriarchy, while O'Hara sends a contemporary queer character back in time to discover the parallels between himself and his enslaved ancestors. Yet, despite their differences, both works make it evident that the conditions of kinship and futurity that characterize enslavement preclude the enslaved from exercising or articulating a queer sexuality. I will describe the conditions of kinlessness and the inability to produce futurity that characterize

[2] The term "reproductive futurity" comes from *No Future*, in which Edelman argues that the figure of "the Child" represents futurity in Western political discourse. While my analysis of contemporary literature supports that assertion, it also implicitly challenges his further argument that queers have a privileged role as the most significant threat to futurity; Edelman does not adequately consider how race affects Western representations of reproduction and futurity. Whenever I use the term "futurity," I am referring to reproductive futurity that would allow intergenerational inheritance and participation in the dominant conception of reproductive futurism for the slaves and former slaves themselves, not to the economic futurity generated for the slave owner by the birth of enslaved children.

slavery, and then show how these conditions register as the unthinkability of the queer slave in *Beloved* and *Insurrection*.

In *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson describes the slave's condition of "natal alienation," meaning that slaves were uprooted from the social structures and kinship ties of their natal society and introduced into the master's society as strangers. The prohibition on formal kinship bonds among slaves extended beyond the moment of social death; kinlessness became the ontological condition of their existence:

> Not only was the slave denied all claims on, and obligations to, his parents and living blood relations but, by extension, all such claims and obligations on his more remote ancestors and on his descendants. He was truly a genealogical isolate. Formally isolated in his social relations with those who lived, he also was culturally isolated from the social heritage of his ancestors. He had a past, to be sure. But a past is not a heritage. (5)

The loss of the putatively natural or organic social ties of the slaves' native society was one aspect of social death, but—especially in the American context, in which most slaves were born into the condition of social death rather than uprooted and transplanted into it—slaves also suffered the possibly greater loss of the opportunity to build new kinship bonds, even in imitation of the norms of their masters. Slaves could create informal marriages and families, but they could also be arbitrarily separated at any time; the concept of monogamy was constantly threatened by the possibility of rape; and one of the major functions of marriage within capitalism—to generate legitimate heirs in order to regulate the disposal of private property—was rendered completely meaningless by the slaves' status *as* property. Slaves were excluded, with violence if necessary, from replicating the only form of sexuality deemed *human* by those in power, and simultaneously excluded from humanity partly on the basis of their "deviant"

sexuality. Futurity was thus a significant locus of exclusion; slaves had no control over their own futures, or over the fates of their children; they could leave no inheritance for their children and did not stand to gain from, or even have knowledge of, their children's future labor or success. Slaves' sexual relations could be termed productive, in that they replenished the master's property, but not generative, inasmuch as they were deprived of any meaningful sense of reproductive futurity.[3]

Hortense Spillers elaborates on the implications of social death for the sexuality of the enslaved in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." She names enslavement as a "*theft* of the *body*—a *willful* and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire" (206; original emphasis). The body represents the human inscribed in discursive systems, conceived of as a "motive will" and an "active desire" coextensive with its material form, and therefore subject to judgment by the standards of human normativity (whatever those standards may be in the time and place in which the body finds itself). Through willfully and violently severing the body from the will/desire,

[3] For further discussion of gender relations and family structure among the enslaved, see Davis and Carby. Davis describes how white normativity as defined by separate spheres ideology excluded slaves from normative gender roles:

> "Woman" became synonymous in the prevailing propaganda with "mother" and "housewife," and both "mother" and "housewife" bore the fatal mark of inferiority. But among Black female slaves, this vocabulary was nowhere to be found. The economic arrangements of slavery contradicted the hierarchical sexual roles incorporated in the new ideology. Male-female relations within the slave community could not, therefore, conform to the dominant ideological pattern. (12)

Carby writes, "Existing outside the definition of true womanhood, black female sexuality was nevertheless used to define what those boundaries were. The contradictions at a material and ideological level can clearly be seen in the dichotomy between repressed and overt representations of sexuality and in the simultaneous existence of two definitions of motherhood: the glorified and the breeder" (30). See Ross, "Beyond the Closet" and Somerville for a discussion of how racial and sexuality normativity became codified in postbellum scientific discourse in a way that continued to deem black sexuality nonnormative *a priori*.

enslavement commits the social murder of the enslaved. Spillers continues, "I would make a distinction […] between 'body' and 'flesh' and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions" (206). The theft of the body is a crime against the flesh, leaving it "seared, divided, ripped-apart[]"—that is, violently severed from the agency that is understood to be coextensive with the human body. As flesh, rather than body, the slave does not possess the agency to express a sexuality that could be interpreted within the bounds of human normativity. Spillers argues that "we could go so far as to entertain the very real possibility that sexuality, as a term of implied relatedness, is dubiously appropriate, manageable, or accurate to *any* of the familial arrangements under a system of enslavement, from the master's family to the captive enclave" (221). In her conception, enslavement annihilates agency and kinship relations to the point that "sexuality" under slavery is not even an available object of study, much less a potential site of queer resistance. Slave sexuality is nonnormative *a priori* regardless of the actual desires, actions, or family structures of the enslaved because of the conditions of extreme coercion and social death under slavery; it does not follow the contingent logic of conformity and deviance that characterizes white normativity and queerness.

The *a priori* nonnormativity of slave sexuality forces us to re-examine queer theory's common practice of equating nonnormativity and queerness. Queer theory emerged as a more mobile, less essentialist alternative to gay and lesbian studies, as described here in David Halperin's definition from *Saint Foucault*:

> As the very word implies, "queer" does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. […] "Queer," then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the

> normative—a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practices. (62; original emphasis)

Halperin makes it clear, however, that his understanding of queer retains its genealogy as a term defined not in opposition to homosexuality but as an extension or mobilization of it, by protesting against "the lack of specifically homosexual content built into the meaning of 'queer,'" which in some deployments "multipl[ies] the opportunities for disidentification, denial, and disavowal" (64). His definition proclaims a universalizing coalition of nonnormativity that would implicitly include black slaves, based on the marginalization of their sexual practices, while relying on "the unique political disabilities and forms of social disqualification from which lesbians and gay men routinely suffer" (65) to give antinormativity meaning. While this methodology has succeeded in untethering queerness from essentialized, ahistorical gay and lesbian identities, I argue that Halperin's brand of queer theory nevertheless cannot account for the kinlessness and lack of futurity that characterize the nonnormativity of slave sexuality because the former still relies upon an understanding of the body and the human will/desire as coextensive and does not grapple with the extreme coercion that produces sexual nonnormativity in the case of slavery. Furthermore, Halperin suspends temporality by focusing on "positionality," making nonnormativity a question of place rather than history, origin, or cause. What is queer is by definition nonnormative but, contrary to Halperin's claim, what is nonnormative is not necessarily queer. *Beloved* provides an example of how the nonnormative sexuality of slaves emerges from a very different genealogy than the nonnormative sexuality Halperin's queerness.

In *Beloved*, the kinlessness of slaves is represented as a traumatic experience of involuntarily nonnormative sexuality. The central conflict of the novel occurs between Paul D, the would-be patriarchal, heterosexual husband and father figure, and Beloved, the otherworldly, inappropriately and excessively sexual woman who inspires perverse desire. Paul D represents the generative reproductive futurity that was denied to slaves, while Beloved represents the nongenerativity of the failed imitations of kinship bonds created among slaves, and its lasting destructiveness in the postbellum black psyche. The two characters wage a battle of allegorical proportions for possession of Sethe. To represent the perversity of Sethe's enthrallment to the trauma of past kinlessness, all nature of nonnormative sexualities are associated with Beloved's influence on other characters, including homoeroticism, incest, prostitution, bestiality and necrophilia.[4]

The foundations of this reading of the character of Paul D (leaving aside Beloved for the moment) are first suggested in an essay by Charles Nero, "Toward a Black Gay Aesthetic" (1991). Nero writes from a perspective centered in reclaiming the literature of black gay men and critiquing the heterosexism of the mainstream of black intellectuals. He situates Morrison's work as an inheritor of the heterosexism found in intellectuals from Frantz Fanon to Amiri Baraka to Eldridge Cleaver: "The acclaimed writer Toni Morrison has woven into her novels these ideas of homosexuality as alien to African cultures, as forced upon black men by racist European civilizations, and as the inability to acquire and sustain manhood" (401-02). His brief discussion of her fiction points out that Morrison imagines the heroic "Sweet Home men" of *Beloved* as

[4] This list may seem surprising to readers of *Beloved* with a less liberal eye for nonnormative sexuality than mine, but I will elaborate on each claim. Often the evidence I use could also be interpreted differently, but Morrison's gothic, affective style and the suffusion of her language with sometimes objectless eroticism authorizes my interpretations as legitimate, although not prevalent, readings.

heteronormatively hierarchizing sexual acts—revering heterosexual sex with Sethe, settling for masturbation, and finally resorting to bestiality without even considering homosexual sex with each other.

In "Femininity, Abjection, and (Black) Masculinity" (2006), Keith Mitchell advances an argument similar to Nero's: in *Beloved* "we encounter the reification of ideas about (black) masculinity and (black) patriarchal heteronormativity predicated by the dominant society" (262). Mitchell substantially extends Nero's argument by adding an account of how Morrison not only imagines Paul D's sexuality as thoroughly normative, but also contrasts it with the foil of Beloved's monstrous nonnormativity. My argument parallels Mitchell's in interpreting the struggle between Paul D and Beloved as the former's attempt to re-establish heteronormative patriarchy by banishing the latter. Whereas I will focus on the nonnormative sexuality deployed and inspired by Beloved in this struggle, Mitchell instead uses Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject to examine the ways in which the female body is represented as the nonnormative other to the masculine, patriarchal force.[5]

[5] Another essay, published in the same volume on the connection between Morrison and James Baldwin as Mitchell's, also takes up a critique of Morrison's heteronormativity, but in a way that provides more of a cautionary tale than a new insight. White reappropriates Morrison's own critique of the willful blindness, or "escape from knowledge," toward African American existence found in European American literature, and in turn accuses her of willful blindness toward the voices of gay men and lesbians in African American writing and the possibilities of gay and lesbian black existence in history. White briefly retraces the grounds of Nero's argument about *Beloved*, then justifies her insistence that black homosexuality existed during slavery with historical evidence that ranges from the imperfect to the egregiously incorrect. Most troublingly, one piece of evidence she relies on heavily is Martin's article on *Cecil Dreeme*, Theodore Winthrop's 1861 novel about sexual ambiguity and homoerotic seduction among white men in New York City. White misreads Martin's analysis of the novel and represents the protagonist's villainous would-be seducer, Densdeth, as the black slave of the protagonist, when he is in fact (in the novel and in Martin's analysis) a white gentleman. White's misreading seems to originate from Martin's discussion of the way in which Densdeth's own African servant (who is a servant, technically, and not a slave) is used as a literary device to represent Densdeth's feminized and savage self, which, while certainly an interestingly oblique glance at constructions of black male

Nero's and Mitchell's assessments of Morrison are valuable, but they are limited by their focus on homosexuality as an identity. They share an essentialized insistence on unearthing the evidence of homosexuality among slaves that they assert *must* exist. Their desire to find evidence of homosexuality specifically, paired with their political motivation to perceive homosexuality as a positive, empowering response to enslavement, partially blinds them to the ways in which other nonnormative sexualities are used to represent the perversions of "normality" caused by enslavement. My approach adds to their critique of Morrison's blindness toward homosexuality by examining her use of other nonnormative sexualities to characterize the perversions of kinship and futurity caused by the legacy of slavery. By using the term "nonnormative" to modify sexuality here, I mean to broaden the theoretical lens through which Nero and Mitchell observe *Beloved* in order to more accurately reflect the diversity of sexuality beyond the homo/hetero binary, especially when discussing a historical era prior to the Foucauldian invention of the homosexual, and yet to preserve the distinction between queer and nonnormative drawn above. I also reorient the critique of *Beloved* away from what Nero and Mitchell assume is an unconscious replication of heteronormativity, and therefore an imperfect textual representation. I suggest instead that we assume Morrison uses nonnormative sexuality to allegorize the conditions of kinlessness and lack of futurity of slavery, and join her in critiquing these structures and their afterlives.

Beloved's concern with kinlessness and the pre-emption of futurity is evident throughout, in an overwhelming accumulation of incidents both central and tangential to the plot. The lack of

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sexuality in the antebellum era, is a far cry from the conclusive proof of master-slave homosexuality that White represents it as being. Ironically, White's willful optimism causes her to see queer slaves where the evidence is scarce, undermining her critique of Morrison's willful blindness.

legal or institutional recognition of kinship bonds among slaves, necessitated by their absolute preclusion from self-determination, is captured in this description: "[I]n all of Baby's life, as well as Sethe's own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized" (23). As Patterson emphasizes, slaves shared informal social relations, including sexual unions and parenting bonds, some of which resembled white heteronormativity and some of which did not; what constituted their natal alienation was that these relationships were not considered legitimate or binding, and could be altered at the master's will (6), just as in Baby Suggs's experience. Baby Suggs's comparison between slaves and checkers captures the dehumanization and commodification of slaves; the relations of structural positionality that give masters authority; and the arbitrariness and powerlessness with which slaves are moved about. The length of the list of possible ways a slave's kinship relations might be disrupted mirrors Baby Suggs's own exhaustion in the face of social death, as the list begins with verbs that require prepositions—"rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up"—and dwindles, as if the speaker were tired of her own voice, to the one-word items, "mortgaged, won, stolen or seized." Morrison represents the slaves' desire to create heterosexual, monogamous, childbearing relationships as natural and human, rather than as an imitation of a construction of white heteronormativity. Thus, their disruption is fundamentally traumatic to the slaves' sense of self and future.

This is seen most clearly in Sethe's "marriage" to Halle. Until its violent dissolution, their relationship embodies heteronormative ideals of choice, monogamy, and childbearing. The slaves of Sweet Home make a symbolic gesture of civilized, manly restraint when Sethe arrives on the plantation and they "let the iron-eyed girl be, so she could choose in spite of the fact that

each one would have beaten the others to mush to have her" (10). They wait for a year for her to choose a husband, battling to control their own sexual urges, so the sexual agency and self-determination of all parties is reaffirmed. The fact that she *will* make a choice and that it will signal an entry into heterosexual monogamy is a foregone conclusion given that Sweet Home is constructed by the master as a place where slave identity can be provisionally human, and that construction of "humanity" relies on heterosexual monogamy. Sethe further exercises her agency in constructing her wedding dress, asserting her self-created humanity through the performance of legitimacy usually denied to slaves. Sethe's humanity is most complete once she is "Halle's woman. Pregnant every year" (9). Humanity, manliness, motherhood and heteronormativity are mutually constitutive.

Even this provisional actualization of humanity makes Sethe stand out among slaves: "Sethe had the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage to that 'somebody' son who had fathered every one of her children" (23). When Mr. Garner dies and schoolteacher arrives with his charts categorizing the slaves' "human" and "animal" characteristics, even this life of seeming agency, sexual pleasure, and generativity turns out to be vulnerable to the arbitrary will of the white master—that is, Sethe and Halle's performance of human sexuality and kinship cannot override their positionality within the legal and institutional structure. The combination of Sethe's whipping with the theft of her milk emphasizes that with absolute bodily control over the slave comes absolute control over her kinship relations. The loss of the heteronormative human ideal represented by Sethe and Halle's marriage precipitates a crisis of manhood in the Sweet Home "men" and traumatizes Sethe to the point that she internalizes her dehumanization and is willing to sacrifice the generative futurity represented by her children to protect them from experiencing the same trauma.

Morrison is nevertheless not completely in agreement with Spillers about the success with which the enslaved could be completely excluded from humanity. Rather than assenting that the complete annihilation of black subjectivity desired by slave owners was actually achieved, she depicts resistance to the denial of slaves' sexual agency in Baby Suggs's sermons and in the advice Denver remembers receiving from her: "Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down. She said for me not to listen to all that. That I should always listen to my body and love it" (209). Although Denver has never been a slave—in fact, her birth occurs at the exact moment of crossing into freedom—Baby Suggs addresses her with the assumption that the postmemory of the accumulation and commodification of the human body affects her traumatically, living on in her psyche as an obstacle between herself and her sexuality. Baby Suggs resists this commodification and passes her resistance on to Denver. Her sense of self-possession and pleasure in herself is in opposition to Spillers's assertion, cited above, that " 'sexuality,' as a term of implied relationship and desire, is dubiously appropriate, manageable, or accurate to any of the familiar arrangements under a system of enslavement" (221). Experiencing sexual pleasure means possessing at least a degree of sexual, and therefore human, agency—a possibility that Morrison, more recuperative than Spillers, embraces.

Morrison is also—tentatively, with significant complications—optimistic about the potential to heal from trauma by reinvesting in heteronormativity in the new context of freedom. Paul D enters the world of Sethe's trauma, represented by her isolation in the house haunted by her murdered baby, and catalyzes this healing by reintroducing her into heterosexual circulation. When he arrives, he takes stock of her situation by asking, "No man? You here by yourself?"

(10). He immediately adopts the roles of lover, provider and husband, telling Sethe, "We can make a life, girl. A life" (46). Paul D coaxes Sethe and Denver to go the carnival, bringing them back into social contact with the community and occasioning the image of the three shadows holding hands that symbolizes the possibility of kinship. He asks Sethe to bear a child for him, and while the reader never learns whether she does, the suggestion is an attempt to draw her out of her enervating repetition of past trauma and back into a generative state in which temporality is structured by the hope of providing a heritage and an inheritance for future generations. When he returns to Sethe's house after his exile and Beloved's exorcism to rouse her from her death-like state, he says to her, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (273). Paul D pulls Sethe toward the future by reawakening her to the possibilities of the same sort of relationship she has tried unsuccessfully to create in the past. When Sethe loses Halle, the idea of generativity itself begins to look like a dead letter; she paradoxically anticipates the restoration of futurity by awaiting the return of Halle, who represents futurity in an ideal sense despite being lost in her past. Paul D does not fundamentally change her heteronormative perceptions of agency, humanity, kinship, and sexuality, but rather attempts only to convince her to see herself in a new relationship to them, and to see him as a possible replacement for the future that Halle once represented.

Beloved, embodying the perverse nongenerativity of dwelling in the traumatic repetition of the past, fights Paul D every step of the way. When he enters the house and initiates changes in Sethe's emotional and physical patterns, her agitation is enough to make the whole house pitch and lurch, and Paul D causes considerable destruction in the process of routing the ghost from the house. The direct antagonism between Paul D and the ghost comes from the fact that as an eligible, heterosexual man interested in Sethe, he represents the possibility of change and

regeneration in a way that is threatening to the ghost's existence. Before his arrival, when the ghost is causing mischief and drives Sethe's two sons Howard and Buglar to run away, "Sethe and Denver tried to call up and reason with the baby ghost, but got nowhere. It took a man, Paul D, to shout it off, beat it off and take its place for himself" (104). This echoes the language Paul D uses when he asks Sethe to convince Denver to accept his cohabitation, saying, "Tell her it's not about choosing somebody over her—it's making space for somebody along with her" (45). The "place" and "space" that Paul D has to carve out in the house are not physical, but temporal and psychic; as a representative of futurity, he cannot coexist with Beloved, who irreducibly represents the past, and he must change Denver's attitude toward the future in order to coexist with her.

The antagonism between Paul D and Beloved only intensifies when she appears in the flesh. They compete for Sethe's attention like jealous lovers, Paul D with a restrained and practical love and Beloved with a greedy and all-consuming one. Beloved gets the upper hand when Paul D is banished and Sethe, realizing Beloved's connection to her lost child, again places her hopes for the future in the past. Sethe thinks, "Obviously the hand-holding shadows she had seen on the road were not Paul D, Denver and herself, but 'us three.' […] Paul D convinced me there was a world out there and that I could live in it. Should have known better" (182). Ultimately, the traumatic, "world"-negating history of slavery threatens to utterly consume Sethe and Denver, causing the backward-looking women to devote all their time and energy to feeding a past that generates nothing of use for the future, just as slaves were forced to invest their human emotions and labor into kinship relations that were formally meaningless, the products of which belonged not to them but to their masters. "Denver thought she understood the connection between her mother and Beloved: Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was

making her pay for it. But there would never be an end to that" (251). There is no "end" to Beloved's unreciprocated absorption of Sethe's love and labor, either in the sense of termination or in the sense of product or goal, because the child Sethe nourishes now belongs to the past just as completely as the slave child belonged to the master. Only the intervention of community members and the return of Paul D save her from self-annihilation.

Over the course of the power struggle between Paul D and Beloved, the images of normative family and manliness deployed by the former are combated by the latter's manipulation of nonnormative, inappropriate and excessive sexuality. To begin with, she uses her sexuality as a weapon to literally move Paul D against his will and coerce him into involuntary sexual acts. This precipitates a crisis in Paul D's view of his own manhood:

> His strength had lain in knowing that schoolteacher was wrong. Now he wondered. […] If schoolteacher was right it explained how he had come to be a rag doll—picked up and put back down anywhere any time by a girl young enough to be his daughter. Fucking her when he was convinced he didn't want to. Whenever she turned her behind up, the calves of his youth (was that it?) cracked his resolve. But it was more than appetite that humiliated him and made him wonder if schoolteacher was right. It was being moved, placed where she wanted him, and there was nothing he was able to do about it. […] Because he was a man and a man could do what he would. […] And it was he, *that* man, who had walked from Georgia to Delaware, who could not go or stay put where he wanted to in 124—shame. (126)

In this experience, Paul D relives the traumatic loss of self-determined mobility and subjection to rape common to slaves. Since his escape from slavery, his one dependable source of self-

determination has been his mobility, which is so antithetical to the state of enslavement.[6] Under Beloved's coercion, his inability to "go or stay put where he wanted to in 124" is the opposite of the steadfastness he promises Sethe when he arrives: "Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you 'fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out" (46). With Sethe, he finally believes he has achieved a productive sexual/kinship relationship—a positive self-determination—in addition to the negative freedom of not being bound to place, only to find himself in an involuntary situation of sexual coercion and nonmonogamy. He feels shame, rather than anger, because his constructions of agency and manhood privilege self-determination, so he reproaches himself for his emasculation. He decides that telling Sethe is the only way to break Beloved's power over him, and he considers saying to her, "[S]omething is happening to me, that girl is doing it. […] Fixing me. Sethe, she's fixed me and I can't break it" (127). The primary meaning of "fixing" here is "exercising supernatural power over," but it carries echoes of emasculation or sexual incapacitation. Instead of admitting this powerlessness, however, Paul D finds "[h]e could not say to this woman who did not squint in the wind, 'I am not a man.' " Instead, without consciously planning to, he blurts out, "I want you pregnant, Sethe. Would you do that for me?" (128). His unconscious impulse compensatorily recuperates his manhood by proclaiming his potency and desire for generativity.

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[6] Hartman explains that in addition to those who undertook unidirectional migration following emancipation, many black people went "on the road," becoming permanently migratory simply to assert a break from the forced immobility of plantation life: "In effect, by refusing to stay in their place, the emancipated insisted that freedom was a departure, literally and figuratively, from their former condition" (128). In *Manning the Race*, Ross connects this migration pattern specifically to constructions of masculinity (23-24). This sheds light on the historical circumstances that inform the associations Paul D makes linking masculinity, freedom, and mobility.

Another element of the passage above also connects Beloved to a nonnormative sexuality that threatens Paul D's sense of manhood and self-possession: her association with bestiality. When she demands that he call her by her name during the sex act, he compulsively calls out "Red heart" (117), which is a transformed echo of "Red Cora" (160), the name of one of the cows on Sweet Home. Why does Paul D blame his weakness toward Beloved on the "calves of his youth"? Beloved presents herself as an animal, "turn[ing] her behind up" to Paul D in imitation of two turtles whose copulation she witnesses, and her animalism awakens an answering animalism in Paul D, both in the sense that he consciously associates her with the calves of his youth and in the sense that his appetite is "animalistic," not restrained and manly. The reduction of Paul D to an animal places him back in the mindset of slavery, when the impossibility of human kinship leads him and the other Sweet Home "men" to seek sexual outlet in animals, threatening the dissolution of his humanity as a consequence. Beloved's sexual interactions with Paul D are nonnormative despite being heterosexual. While Nero and Mitchell both comment on the Sweet Home men's preference for bestiality over homosexuality, they do not expand their analyses of nonnormative sexuality beyond the homo/hetero binary by tracing the ways in which Morrison deploys bestiality to characterize Beloved's sexual sway over Paul D as a representation of the perversions caused by slavery.

In addition to her nonnormative heterosexual interactions with Paul D, Beloved is also associated with homoeroticism in the possessive, desirous, incestuous triangle formed by Sethe, Denver, and herself. While the plot does not necessitate the reading that the women have homosexual interactions with each other, the richly suggestive language that describes their infatuations with each other adds homoeroticism to the web of perverse, nonnormative sexualities Beloved weaves. Furthermore, Morrison's attention to psychic and familial dynamics

engages a conversation with the Freudian staging of sexual development in the context of the family. While my reading is not purely psychoanalytic, this engagement authorizes a reading of the eroticism within sisterly and mother-daughter relationships.

When Beloved appears, Denver is instantly smitten. Sethe and Paul D make more quotidian observations about her name and appearance; "Denver, however, was shaking. She looked at this sleepy beauty and wanted more" (53). Beloved's arrival is a turning point in Denver's sexuality. Living alone with her mother, Denver's only sexual outlet has been narcissistic masturbation. She escapes to a "room" walled by boxwood bushes planted in a ring behind the house:

> Denver's secrets were sweet. Accompanied every time by wild veronica until she discovered cologne. […]
>
> It began as a little girl's houseplay, but as her desires changed, so did the play. Quiet, private and completely secret except for the noisome cologne signal that thrilled the rabbits before it confused them. […] In that bower, closed off from the hurt of the hurt world, Denver's imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. *Wore her out*. Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish.
>
> Once when she was in the boxwood, an autumn long before Paul D moved into the house with her mother, she was made suddenly cold by a combination of wind and the perfume on her skin. She dressed herself, bent down to leave and stood up in snowfall. (28-29; original emphasis)

That Denver is masturbating in her boxwood room is signaled by the sensual excitement she derives from the cologne on her skin, which also "thrills" and "confuses" the rabbits; the naming

of her "changing desires"; and the post-hoc revelation that she is undressed when she dresses herself, suggestively more erotic than a straightforward statement. The primary narcissism in which she remains entrapped is signified by her imagination, which "produced its own hunger and its own food."

When Beloved arrives, Denver suddenly has an external object of desire, and leaves her childhood masturbation behind: "So intent was her nursing [of Beloved], she forgot to eat or visit the emerald closet" (54). Later, as they dance together, Denver realizes that "[s]he had not been in the tree room once since Beloved sat on their stump after the carnival, and had not remembered that she hadn't gone there until this very desperate moment. Nothing was out there that this sister-girl did not provide in abundance: a racing heart, dreaminess, society, danger, beauty" (76). The hyphenation of "sister-girl" signals a double possible explanation for Denver's intense libidinal investment in Beloved: first as a longed-for sister, a recuperation of severed kinship bonds, and secondly, in a role that any girl could fill, as a possible external object of desire that intervenes in Denver's primary narcissism.

Denver's relationship to Beloved is further eroticized after Beloved's exorcism, when Paul D asks her if she believes that Beloved was truly her sister. Denver's words are suggestive, her body language even more revealing: "Denver looked at her shoes. 'At times. At times I think she was—more.' She fiddled with her shirtwaist, rubbing a spot of something" (266). Paul D's question renders her self-conscious of her embodiment; she looks down at herself. The "spot of something" she rubs can be read as a clitoral metonym, a tactile substitute either for her erotic fixation on Beloved or for the masturbation she gives up on Beloved's arrival. Since Denver reaches for it at the moment she describes Beloved as a surplus, the spot is a material stand-in for the absent girl, who is both "more" than a sister and, now, less than a material presence in

Denver's life. It is certainly also possible to read Denver's "more" as describing Beloved's supernatural properties and her connection to the middle passage and slavery, as many critics rightly do, but the passage's concern with embodiment and the place Beloved occupies in Denver's sexual development justify this homoerotic interpretation as well.

Just as Denver is homoerotically devoted to Beloved, so Beloved is infatuated with Sethe. When she asks Sethe to tell her a story, the interaction is charged with desire: Sethe "was sliding into sleep when she felt Beloved touch her. A touch no heavier than a feather but loaded, nevertheless, with desire. […] The longing she saw there was bottomless. Some plea barely in control" (58). In both dyads, homoeroticism mixes with incest and narcissism to produce the threat of complete self-annihilation in the other. Sethe stops providing for herself and Denver, as Beloved insatiably consumes all the food in the house and all of Sethe's mental and emotional energy. The addition of erotic language, loaded with "desire" and "longing," to the claim that Beloved makes in the capacity of Sethe's murdered daughter illustrates how Morrison uses nonnormative sexuality to represent the destructive and almost inescapable effects of slavery on the black postbellum psyche. Only Denver's ability to recognize the deathliness toward which their overfeeding of Beloved and self-deprivation tends, and her channeling of Baby Suggs's resistant consciousness, allow them to escape.

Beloved does not have a "real" sexual identity, but destructive, nonreproductive, and nonnormative sexualities accrete around her, reflected in her actions and in her effects on other characters. In addition to bestiality, rape, incest and homoeroticism, she is connected to prostitution since Sethe trades sex for Beloved's headstone carving: "Ten minutes for seven letters" (5). Prostitution is similar to slavery in that it represents the commercialization of the body and a complete replacement of kinship relations with monetary relations, although it differs

significantly insofar as the prostitute, as a worker, retains self-determination in a way that the slave, as an object, does not. In Morrison's representation, prostitution is also related to slavery because it involves sex that generates no futurity, leading only to the grave. Sethe's prostitution literally purchases Beloved's grave; Beloved takes her name from that headstone and in turn threatens to take Sethe and Denver back into the grave with her through her insatiable consumption; and while the en*grave*r exacts his fee, Sethe leans against a headstone with "her knees wide open as the grave" (5). Prostitution as a form of nonnormative sexuality reflects the social death and the impossibility of futurity in slavery.

Beloved can also be thought of as inducing necrophilia, since, as her monologue reveals, she has returned from a cramped, liminal space that represents both the middle passage and death. This is reflected in her effect on Paul D after they have sex: "And afterward, beached and gobbling air, in the midst of repulsion and personal shame, he was thankful too for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to" (264). Although ultimately she must be rejected and exorcised, Beloved embodies part of the traumatic experience of all survivors and descendants of the middle passage. Her gift and her threat lie in her ability to pull the free black body back into the psychic conditions of slavery—an encounter that is potentially deadly, but can be cathartic if survived, explaining Paul D's gratitude. When he has sex with Beloved, Paul D becomes a necrophile not only in the sense that he is sleeping with a ghost, but also in the sense that he is reliving his own and his people's social death in the middle passage. The irresistible allure of Beloved's nonnormative sexuality serves in part as a metaphor for the perverse, insistent pull of the traumatic past. At the same time, nonnormative sexualities are seen as the actual postbellum inheritance of the kinlessness of slavery. Either way, the possibility of

an articulated queer slave identity is absolutely foreclosed by the deathly, nongenerative nature of any sexuality associated with subjection to slavery.

Beloved deploys nonnormative sexuality to link slavery to perversion and perversity, but not to the "queer," in the sense of an identity or set of practices that imagines the body and the will/desire as coextensive and resistant to or disruptive of oppressive heteronormativity. Rather, the nonnormativity imposed by slavery is the constitutive other against which Sethe's achievement of heteronormativity is valued. A different but related set of parallelisms and foreclosures comes to bear when authors with an investment in representing queer identity in a positive light reimagine slavery. For the protagonists of these texts, family and racial identities are constructed around the history of slavery, and queer sexuality is associated with encounters between characters from different time periods and races. Robert O'Hara's play *Insurrection: Holding History* represents this positionality.

In *Insurrection*, a contemporary gay African American Ph.D. candidate, Ron, makes a journey into the past with the help of his 189-year-old great-great-grandfather, T.J., a former slave. Ron is working on a thesis on Nat Turner's rebellion in order to earn a degree in "Slave History" from Columbia. In the present, T.J. can only move his left eye and one toe, but he speaks to Ron through visions and transports him back in time to witness Nat Turner's rebellion, in which T.J. as a young, able-bodied slave participated. Through this use of magical realism, O'Hara separates slave and queer identities by historical era but also brings them into contact in a fantastical—and often farcical—collision. Ron discovers a parallel between his great-great-grandfather's enslaved identity and his own queer identity, and also encounters an enslaved character, Hammet, who initiates homoerotic interactions but is unable to articulate a sexual identity to Ron or express nonnormative sexuality to his fellow slaves.

The prevailing interpretation in the small body of critical literature on *Insurrection* reads this collision as representing the recovery of a homosexual past for enslaved African Americans, and by extension a queer inheritance for their contemporary kin.[7] Faedra Chatard Carpenter writes, "[B]y staging intersections and conflations of time, place, space, and perspective […] *Insurrection: Holding History* uses the fantastical to emancipate African American history and identity from the bondage of compulsive white heteronormativity" (324). Following Nero and Mitchell, Carpenter identifies the lack of historical evidence for slave homosexuality as evidence of the "compulsive white heteronormativity" of historians, rather than a reflection of the ontological limitations that foreclosed expressions of queer sexuality for slaves. In other words, these critics focus on critiquing representation, rather than analyzing these neo-slave narratives as allegories of real violence and material conditions. Carpenter praises O'Hara for "demonstrating that homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is a natural proclivity among other possibilities," "a viable and unaffected possibility," "a natural phenomenon" (336). This essentialist interpretation is supported by O'Hara's own statement in an interview in *American Theatre*. The interviewer comments, "One of the boldest aspects of your play is the juxtaposition of slavery and homosexuality. I don't think anyone has really dealt with that issue dramatically before now," and O'Hara responds, "Yes, well, that is my whole point. […] I do not believe that homosexuals were invented in 1969. If I exist now, someone like me had to exist before me or I wouldn't be here" (Werner 26).[8]

[7] While the character Ron is identified as "gay" and a "faggot" in the play, readings like Carpenter's consistently identify O'Hara's framework as "queer" because of its destabilizing approach to history and identity. This slippage also provides further evidence of the way that homosexuality persists as a primary genealogical influence upon queer theory.

[8] By choosing the year 1969, O'Hara of course refers to the Stonewall riots that helped mark the emergence of the contemporary gay rights movement, but for my purposes in this paper he could

But if homosexuality is a "natural proclivity" for slaves as well as for contemporary African Americans, why are "intersections and conflations of time, place, space, and perspective" necessary to render it imaginable? Why must the gay character reside in the present while the enslaved characters reside in the past? Why is Hammet's homoerotic desire triggered by an encounter with Ron, rather than expressed in relation to another enslaved character? It is revealing that O'Hara's interviewer identifies his project as a *juxtaposition* of slavery and homosexuality, while O'Hara responds as if she says *combination*. I argue that O'Hara's play represents an effort to imagine the existence of a queer slave, but encounters and thus reveals the obstacles to such a project posed by the ontological limits of the two identities. While the trajectories of the queer and the slave literally intersect as they fly through space and time in O'Hara's play, the ontological limits of the two identities require that they be embodied in two different characters whose meeting can occur only in a fantastic genre, whose interaction exhibits parallelisms of representation but radical incommensurabilities of specific experience.

Queer and slave positionality are paralleled through the interest Ron and T.J. take in each other's experiences. As a scholar, unaware that his great-great-grandfather had participated, Ron feels compelled to write about Nat Turner's rebellion even though he cannot identify what new information or interpretation he has to add to its history. He finds the cure for his writer's block when he returns to his childhood home in Virginia for T.J.'s 189th birthday party, and T.J. reveals to him that he has waited a hundred years to ask him for a favor: "take me home ronnie. / Drive me. Carry me. Push me. Take. Me. Home" (19). As it dawns on Ron that "home" is Southampton, Virginia, where the rebellion occurred, and that T.J. was a witness and participant, his anxiety about catching his plane back to New York and putting an outline of his thesis on the

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just have easily said 1870, the date of the Foucauldian invention of the homosexual (Foucault 43).

dean's desk by Monday is eclipsed by his desire to share this experience with T.J. His motivation remains, however, academic: his immediate thought is "my. thesis" (19), and he asks T.J. to wait while he gets his tape recorder in order to document the experience as research. It is up to T.J. to make Ron understand that slavery and rebellion are part of Ron's personal heritage and identity, and that transmitting the experience is a way for T.J. to claim Ron as kin— as the embodiment of his ability to generate futurity.

He does this by appealing to a comparison with Ron's queer self-identification. As they drive through the countryside in the middle of the night, Ron rambles urgently, "all you can say is HOME HOME HOME I've explained to you my thesis and my interest in Nat Turner's Insurrection you know I need to find out about"— and T.J. cuts him off suddenly with the question, "You a faggot ain't ya? / *(beat)* / When was you plannin' on tellin' me?" (23). Ron insists that a conversation about his sexuality is irrelevant to the situation at hand and that he is not "comfortable" talking about it, but T.J. insists: "I thought you wanted ta know everythang? […] So you want me ta tell you everythang but you don't wanna tell me nuthin you ain't comfortable" (24). To Ron, his academic pursuit of information bears no comparison to T.J.'s very personal questions about sex and sexuality; to T.J., the parallel between Ron's desire to know his past and his desire to be included in Ron's present is self-evident. In their rhetorical battle over which character has the responsibility to share his experiences with the other, T.J. figures queerness and enslavement as parallel identities, the understanding of which informs the construction of kinship ties across generations.

This deployment leads to very different visions of generativity and futurity when compared with those I identify in *Beloved*. While the creation of kinship bonds with future generations in *Beloved* centers on literal reproduction and parenting, in *Insurrection* the former

slave can enjoy an unmediated relationship with his great-great-grandson, and the question of the literal continuation of the family tree is secondary. The question of whether Ron will reproduce and be able to form kinship relations with his offspring is never raised; to T.J. futurity really means being able to share his own experience with Ron and understand Ron's in return, generating a future for both of their personal identities. As Ron and T.J. walk through the woods on their way from T.J.'s home plantation to one of Nat Turner's secret meetings,
T.J. again solicits information about being a "faggot" from Ron and makes it clear that he is offering his experience as an equal exchange for being included in Ron's experience:

> RON *(laughing)*: why are you so interested in that Gramps?
>
> T.J.: why are you so interested in this?
>
> RON: this is my past
>
> T.J.: you my future.
>
> you the one gon' carry my scars.
>
> […] promise me somethin' ronnie—[…]
>
> promise me
>
> you be safe
>
> you live in dangerous times
>
> just lak we do heah
>
> so
>
> you be safe
>
> . . . okay?
>
> RON: . . . . . i promise
>
> T.J.: you my future (68)

In this exchange, the threat to queer futurity lurks in the "dangerous times" in which Ron lives, that is, the social oppression that makes queer black survival so tenuous, rather than the possibility that as a gay man Ron will opt out of reproductive futurism's mandate to produce biological heirs. Ron confirms this interpretation of the threat to queer futurity when he attempts to dissuade the slave conspirators from rebelling because of his knowledge that they will all be executed for their participation. When one of them asks him, "you ain't gat somethin' ta die fo'? / where you come from / you ain't gat somethin' you willin' / ta die fo'?" he responds, "where I come from / if you die / it's over / if you die they win / you cain't fight no more / if you're dead / it's over" (92-93). The slaves, who are willing to kill and die for their cause, are fighting from a place of social death and do not regard the contracts of liberal humanism as binding, nor their deaths as a defeat, since the end of slavery is their ultimate victory. In contrast, Ron speaks with the urgency of the AIDS epidemic and the suicide rate among queer youth implicit in his words. To him, death is not a collateral risk of the struggle against oppression, but the definition of defeat; survival itself is a victory and a promise of futurity. By the end of his trip into the history of slavery, Ron is ready to adopt the slaves' position and fight in the rebellion, risking death, but T.J. insists that he retain his own positionality by echoing Ron's earlier words: "you wont live heah they'll kill you along wit the rest you know you read it you studied it thousands of white troops hundreds of dead slaves they'll destroy this place / History / HIStory / cain't be stopped / do what you can in yo' Own Time / i need you to LIVE / Go Back. / Don't die" (102). In *Insurrection*, unlike *Beloved*, the meaning of futurity is flexible depending on the subject's identification, and both T.J.'s need for futurity after slavery and Ron's need for the futurity of queer survival are fulfilled by the contact between the two characters.

Still, the parallelism of slave and queer identity leads to a non-intersection that O'Hara stages throughout the play. The difference between the visions of futurity held respectively by Ron and the slaves is one example of the differences between slave and queer experience. Another important division is that the temporal distance between the representatives of the two identities renders queerness unintelligible to the slave. T.J. bridges this knowledge gap in some ways because of his unnaturally long life, but to the other slaves Ron meets in the past, queerness remains inarticulable and foreign. While T.J. is bringing Ron back into history to share the meaning of slave identity, and expects Ron to share the meaning of contemporary queer identity with him in exchange, he draws the line at Ron's trying to impart a modern perspective to the other slaves: he advises Ron, "keep ya mouth shut and you'll do fine you don' know nuthin 'bout nuthin" (42).

The unintelligibility between queer and slave identities is demonstrated to comic and scandalous effect when Ron, posing as a free black from the North, meets the overseer of T.J.'s plantation. Finding the overseer beating a female slave for not picking cotton fast enough Ron, no longer able to pretend he knows "nuthin 'bout nuthin," interjects, "MUTHAFUCKA HAVE YOU LOST YO' FUCKIN' MIND!?!" After a stunned silence, the following exchange of overly literal, yet disguised introductions takes place:

OVA SEEA JONES: nigga what's yo' name?

RON: . . . Faggot

OVA SEEA JONES: FAGGOT what did you just say ta me?

RON: I said MUTHAFUCKA—

(OVA SEEA JONES spits in Ron's face.)

OVA SEEA JONES: How you find out I was Fuckin' yo' Mutha boy? (45)

Both Ron and the overseer misapprehend their own meanings in the labels they use to name one another, even though they deploy them appropriately. The overseer insults Ron and scandalizes the audience by hurling the term "faggot" at him— especially since in earlier dialogue Ron makes it clear that "Only Faggots are allowed to call each other Faggots" (24)—and, revealing the most complex part of this deconstructive exchange, he does not even understand the implications of using the word "faggot," yet undoubtedly would willingly deploy it to the same effect if he did. This produces a simultaneous doubling *and* disavowal of the word's meaning. Similarly, Ron originally calls the overseer a "motherfucker" as a generic term of disdain, but the overseer's literal joke of a response reminds Ron, and the audience, that it is completely probable that the overseer *does* rape, if not Ron's mother, then his great-great-grandmother. This is both sobering and comic, and like the overseer, Ron does not speak with the intention to make this implication, yet would not have hesitated to make it, either. Ron and the overseer speak parallel languages, in which signifiers, meanings, and intentions sometimes "rhyme," but are not actually mutually intelligible.

We see evidence of this also in Ron's encounter with the slave Hammet. In this character, O'Hara represents a slave with queer desire and runs into the ontological limits that prevent such a slave from articulating a queer identity. Hammet initiates an intimate connection with Ron through physical behaviors indicated in the stage directions: gazing, kissing, touching, and "blowing sweet air" into each other's mouths. Hammet remains silent in response to questions about his identity at crucial moments during these exchanges, however, emphasizing that his "queerness" is not captured in contemporary terminology. As Hammet makes physical advances, Ron asks, "uh . . . / wait a second . . . uh . . . are you . . . do you . . . you like boys?" (87). Ron's hesitation between framing the question as "are you" or "do you" echoes the classic Foucauldian

distinction between doing and being, that is, between homosexuality as a behavior and as an identity (Foucault 43). Hammet avoids participating in the logic of Ron's question by responding simply, "I lak you" (87). Hammet's invention of "blowing sweet air" is, partly, a stage-appropriate proxy for sexual exchange, highlighting the conventions of representation in drama written for live performance that shape expression differently from those of fiction. However, "blowing sweet air" is also significant for its nonresemblance to what the contemporary characters consider sexual behavior. This nonresemblance reinforces the idea that Hammet is *not* fundamentally just another faggot, identical to Ron but from a different historical era. It occasions another comical "rhyme" of signifiers when Ron tries to explain his connection with Hammet to the contemporary characters by saying, "you people don't understand!! / We BLEW Each Other" (98).

The lack of a common language that could communicate the nature of Ron and Hammet's relationship to one another and to the other characters is paradigmatic of the incommensurability of slave and queer identity. The ontologies that inform each identity's relation to kinship and futurity preclude the creation of such a common language. Authors with an investment in representing and reconciling both identities are thus hemmed into a model of parallelism rather than of intersectionality.

Although slave and queer identity in antebellum America are mutually exclusive, they are also fundamentally intertwined, insofar as the definitions of both revolve around the regulation of intimacy, agency, kinship, and futurity. Queers and slaves both tread the terrain of nonnormativity, but with widely divergent cartographies. I propose that this explains why so many of the contemporary works of African American literature that imaginatively reinhabit slave identity also thematize queer or nonnormative sexuality. I would provisionally suggest that

Beloved and *Insurrection* represent two fundamental ways in which contemporary fiction and drama that reinhabit slavery can incorporate nonnormative sexuality. These works fall into two primary categories: those like *Beloved* that deploy nonnormative sexuality negatively to represent the threat to black identity posed by kinlessness and lack of futurity, and those like *Insurrection* with a queer-identified author or protagonist, which are invested in rehabilitating the queer from the former's discursive positioning. The latter, while bringing queers and slaves into narrative proximity, generally conceive of queerness as radically foreign to the experience of the slave, whether it originates from a character of another race, another historical era, or another world. The first category includes works such as Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*; the second category includes Jewelle Gomez's *Gilda Stories* and Randall Kenan's *A Visitation of Spirits*. Writers such as Gomez, Kenan, and O'Hara feel that reimagining slavery is a vital part of writing about black identity today, and that if slave identity is vital today, then it is bound to intersect with contemporary queer identity—yet when they attempt to bring the two identities into textual coexistence, they run up against incommensurable constructions of kinship and futurity.

Chapter Two:

The White Subject in the Web of Safety: White Failure, Black Preclusion, and Normativity in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

> "I think white gay people feel cheated because they were born, in principle, in a society in which they were supposed to be safe. The anomaly of their sexuality puts them in danger, unexpectedly."
>
> - James Baldwin, *Village Voice* interview, 1984

The previous chapter explored how kinlessness and lack of futurity register as *a priori* sexual nonnormativity in contemporary literature that re-inhabits slavery. In this chapter, we move forward in narrative time to consider modern sexual formations in literature set in the twentieth century. Overwhelmingly, and as an inheritance from its founding saint, Michel Foucault, queer theory describes sexuality as a construction of society and a scientific practice organized around normativity. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that the Norm has equaled or surpassed the Law in its ability to mobilize modern forms of power. In *The History of Sexuality*, he specifies that in the realm of sexual acts, the shift from juridical to normative power took the form of the now familiar shift from "sodomy" to "homosexuality." The sodomite of bygone days willfully transgressed the law on the occasion of individual infractions, while the modern homosexual, for complex reasons grounded in the sciences of anatomy, physiology, and psychology, fails to conform to the normative sexuality expressed by the majority of the population. Following Foucault, therefore, most queer theorists describe queer sexuality as a *failure* to conform to the norm. For example, this can be seen in Judith Butler's question, "How

must we rethink the ideal morphological constraints upon the human such that those who fail to approximate the norm are not condemned to a death within life?" (xx)[9]

In this chapter, I argue that the common description of queerness as failure implicitly imagines queerness as a temporal process (even when the authors clearly understand this process to be synchronic, repetitive, or constantly performed) that does not account for the *a priori* exclusion of the ontology of blackness from normative sexuality. The process implicit in queerness-as-failure is this: the norm preexists the individual subject; the subject is required to live up to/embody/perform the norm; the subject fails to adequately do so; the subject is found to be queer; the subject is punished accordingly. The "punishment" tends to take the form of physical or discursive exclusion/abjection from the fold of civil society; the punished queer then becomes part of the constitutive "outside" of civil society, which, as Butler points out, is not *actually* unrepresentable in discourse, but is represented as unrepresentable (or illegible, unthinkable, etc.). Queer theorists tend to implicitly understand this process to be synchronic, repetitive, or constantly performed, but nevertheless temporal, unfolding in stages. Many definitions of queerness totalizingly equate this form of queerness-as-failure and nonnormative sexuality; this is characteristic of queer theorists from David Halperin's early claim that "Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (62), to the consensus that has emerged in contemporary black queer theory that, as Darieck Scott puts it in *Extravagant Abjection*, "blackness is rendered by the various cultural, social, and economic processes of white supremacist domination as the exemplar of nonnormative genders and sexualities. [… B]lackness *is* queer" (10). But examining sexuality on a spectrum from normal to

[9] Versions of this description of failure can be found structuring the logic of many queer theorists, including—to name only a few—Judith Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* and *The Queer Art of Failure*, Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, and Jose Esteban Munoz's *Disidentifications* and *Cruising Utopia.*

abnormal, or normative to nonnormative, and correlating that spectrum with being included in or excluded from civil society, obscures the crucial structural difference between landing in the constitutive outside of normativity contingently upon infraction, and *a priori* as an element of political ontology associated with the race of one's birth.

James Baldwin, arguably the best-known black writer on nonnormative sexuality[10] in American history, is at once a devastating yet equivocal analyst of the structural difference between black and white sexualities. His allegiance is claimed by—or, less lovingly, attributed to—many different factions of the divergent black political scene of the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Was he more aligned with Martin Luther King, Jr., or Malcolm X? Did he advocate nonviolent resistance, or violent revolt? Did he perceive there to be an irreconcilable antagonism between black and white, or believe that the conflict could be resolved through human transcendence? Evidence can be marshaled for either side of these questions, so the answer can only be "all of the above." The stakes of these questions for my own project do not lie in "proving" that Baldwin unequivocally supports my argument that nonnormative sexuality is a wedge in the irreconcilable gulf between black political ontology and civil society, but rather lie in taking an extremely equivocal author as a limit case, demonstrating that the effects of this gulf are registered both consciously and symptomatically in Baldwin's nuanced portrayals of complex racial and sexual dynamics.

Partly, the difficulty in precisely attributing Baldwin's political allegiance is due to changes in his beliefs over time and the futility of trying to distill a single, consistent philosophy

[10] Baldwin is often described as "gay," but both in his life and in his fiction was more disposed to experience and portray sexuality as fluid and not confined to same-sex interactions. In the 1984 *Village Voice* interview, he rejects the term "gay," saying that in his fantasy of the future "New Jerusalem," "No one will have to call themselves gay. Maybe that's at the bottom of my impatience with the term. It answers a false argument, a false accusation" (Goldstein 184).

from the oeuvre of a prolific lifetime; as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (disapprovingly) summarizes, his essays register a shift from an optimistic belief in human complexity and the ability to transcend racial differences, as seen in "The Fire Next Time" (1963), to a more pessimistic critique of white supremacy and an emphatic endorsement of the Black Panthers' politics and tactics by "No Name In the Street" (1972). Houston A. Baker, Jr. attempts to recuperate Baldwin from the other side of the aisle from Gates, emphasizing that his increasing sympathy with black nationalism in *No Name In the Street* represents a commitment to black culture, although he ultimately comes up short: "He may *understand* the life of the avenue (lauding the Black Panthers and their programs), but he knows he can never again be an integral part of such a life. A younger, more fiery generation does not even know his name. And it is they who will give birth to a new world" (74).[11] In *James Baldwin's Later Fictions*, Lynn Orilla Scott notes the irony of Baldwin's legacy being rejected by black nationalists for being too moderate, and by liberals for declining in aesthetic quality and originality as a result of becoming too radical; she states, "The reading of Baldwin's later work as lacking aesthetic value is as problematic as the reading of his earlier work as lacking political value" (10). Scott challenges the Gates/Baker narrative of increasing radicalism combined with aesthetic decline by reassessing the later novels for their aesthetic quality; while I agree with Scott, I choose to challenge it in the opposite way, by reassessing the early novel *Giovanni's Room* for its insistence on the irreconcilable differences between black political ontology and civil society. This chapter's epigraph, from a 1984 *Village Voice* interview, shows that in his later stages Baldwin delivered a devastatingly simple critique of the difference between white failure and black preclusion: "A black gay person who is a sexual

[11] For further discussion of Baldwin's political equivocations, see C. W. E. Bigsby's "The Divided Mind of James Baldwin" and Will Walker's "After *The Fire Next Time*: James Baldwin's Postconsensus Double Bind."

conundrum to society is already, long before the question of sexuality comes into it, menaced and marked because he's black or she's black. The sexual question comes after the question of color; it's simply one more aspect of the danger in which all black people live. I think white gay people feel cheated because they were born, in principle, in a society in which they were supposed to be safe. The anomaly of their sexuality puts them in danger, unexpectedly" (Goldstein 180). This chapter endeavors to show that this was a continuation of, not a deviation from, the critique developed twenty-eight years earlier in his second novel.

Besides the changes in Baldwin's beliefs over time, another reason for the equivocation in attributing his legacy to any particular political position lies in the formal elements of his fiction. The long novels *Another Country, Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone,* and *Just Above My Head* sprawl and linger, leaving many loose ends unresolved, and his narrative voice passes easily and with deep empathy between characters who are extremely diverse in identity and philosophy—in short, Baldwin is a master of polyvocality. He persistently thematizes without resolving the tensions between integrationism, nonviolent resistance, and revolt; his protagonists often deliberate among positions on this spectrum represented by the characters that surround them—for example, Leo Proudhammer of *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* is torn between his mirror-image female white liberal and male black radical lovers, and Hall Montana of *Just Above My Head* is turned off by the preaching of the Nation of Islam, but says, "[L]et the record also state that, if I didn't love the people I love, I'd think nothing of blowing the unspeakably obscene mediocrities who rule the American State into eternity—and go to meet them there" (179). This polyvocality makes interpretation of Baldwin's corpus a Rorschach test. *Giovanni's Room* is certainly more single-minded than the longer novels, with a single protagonist, a more unified set of symbolic structures, and a more cohesive plot, but Baldwin

introduces a critical element of polyvocality by adopting the voice of a white man as his narrator, thereby creating an implicit position outside of the first-person narration from which to critique. Contrary to the popular intersectional interpretation that sees David's experience as a queer man as an analogy for black positionality, I argue that Baldwin makes his most iconically queer protagonist white precisely to show that the normative structures of sexuality that totalizingly confine the white subject leave black structural positionality by the wayside.

In *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin shows how the pressures of normative sexuality bear upon a queer white American in France. The racial identities and racialized experiences of the characters, and the novel's metaphorical and symbolic structures, represent black sexuality as nonnormative *a priori*, while white sexuality is nonnormative contingently upon the temporal process of failure. Throughout the novel, the protagonist David is torn between the heteronormative safety represented by his American girlfriend Hella, and the deviance, social marginality, and compelling physical and emotional attraction represented by his Italian lover Giovanni. He chooses Hella and abandons Giovanni, but when Giovanni subsequently commits a desperate act of murder and is sentenced to death, David is so haunted and paralyzed by guilt that Hella leaves him anyway. (Well, that, and she catches him having an affair with a sailor.) The novel is narrated retrospectively, through David's flashbacks, on the day that Giovanni is to be executed.

Like questions of Baldwin's political allegiance, the questions of sexual identity raised by *Giovanni's Room* have generated enough variety of critical reactions to merit the conclusion that his message is more equivocal than straightforward. The first wave of critical reactions to the book lamented that Baldwin had left behind the "American" themes of his first novel, *Go Tell It On the Mountain*, and criticized him for having "bleached" his characters (Bone 226). In other

words, critics were upset because they expected a black author to write about black characters, not white ones, and especially not *queer* white ones.

Later, critics began to point out that by strategically writing about white expatriates, Baldwin "freed" himself to write about homosexuality. For example, Cyraina Johnson-Rouiller writes, "Baldwin's choice of David as the white American protagonist serves as the means by which the novel's problem is kept pure, free of sociological interference—at least in terms of the conventional assumptions about race which might be applied to the work of a black author. Because David is a white American, the problem of homosexuality cannot be obfuscated by the problem of race, nor can its cultural significance" (940). The obviously underexamined conflation of whiteness with purity, freedom, and lack of obfuscation is clearly part of what the more recent wave of critics were reacting against when they re-opened the question of the orientation of *Giovanni's Room* to racial issues.

Roughly since the turn of the millennium, black queer theory[12] has flowered and come into its own, and it is, naturally, *de rigueur* for literarily inclined black queer theorists to comment on Baldwin and particularly on *Giovanni's Room*. This latest generation of critics argue that while Baldwin did gain a measure of freedom specifically from the literary conventions of the black protest novel by writing about white expatriates, he also uses the characters' experience of uprootedness, exile, marginality, and oppression to analogize black positionality in America. For example, Sharon Patricia Holland argues that in a certain sense, "these are black characters in whiteface" (105). Mae Henderson describes Baldwin's creation of white characters as "racial drag," a strategic decision to enable the writing of a "thinly veiled, autobiographical novel" (300). Similarly, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman writes, "For Baldwin the

[12] As distinct from black lesbian feminism and black gay male critiques, significant precursors.

experience of exile, of living as a stranger in an unfamiliar country, powerfully parallels—and analogizes—the social alienation and psychic fragmentation that African Americans and/as sexual outsiders experience at home in the United States" (478). Meanwhile, Kathryn Bond Stockton asserts that signifiers of shame and death link blackness and queerness in the novel, based partially on reading the Italian Giovanni's "darkness" as racialization.

Despite meaningful differences between them, as a group, these theorists emphasize the similarities between race and sexuality, and therefore between the groups oppressed on both counts, over the differences between them. Based on the perceived similarities between a queer white expatriate and a queer black one, they read David's voice as if it were Baldwin's, misrecognizing the extent to which the author distances himself from and critiques his narrator. I argue instead that *Giovanni's Room* shows precisely the differences between being (white and) queer and being black by dramatizing the process of white failure-to-conform to the normativity from which the black is excluded *a priori*.

Like much white queer European and American literature, *Giovanni's Room* thematizes inclusion and exclusion of subjects on the spectrum from normative to nonnormative through symbolism and metaphors of death, falling, filth, waste, decay, shame, contagion, and the expulsion thereof. Therefore, David's experience exemplifies the temporal process of queerness-as-failure. For example, David describes, "I met Giovanni during my second year in Paris, when I had no money. On the morning of the evening that we met I had been turned out of my room. I did not owe an awful lot of money, only around six thousand francs, but Parisian hotel-keepers have a way of smelling poverty and then they do what anybody does who is aware of a bad smell: they throw whatever stinks outside" (22). Being expelled from his apartment like "a bad smell" is not causally or necessarily related to his meeting Giovanni, but the two events'

proximity ("On the morning of the evening…") suggests a symbolic association between them. By describing the expulsion as "*what anybody does* who is aware of a bad smell," David captures the act's normativizing power and the exclusion or abjection from civil society—from the category of "anybody"—that attends being treated like a bad smell. When "whatever stinks" is "throw[n]… outside," the stinking object is not only ejected from its home and place in the world, it is also transformed from a *who-* to a *what*ever and severed from the personhood of the "anybody" doing the throwing. Like the process of queer failure, this being-thrown-outside is a temporal experience that reveals the fact that David was once inside as much as that he is now outside. His exclusion from civil society is contingent upon his beginning to smell of poverty, rather than being inherent in the white subject position into which he was born.

In short order, the quotidian example of expulsion-upon-infraction afforded by the hotel eviction is transmuted into a heavier-handed allusion to a biblical eviction, the fall from the Garden of Eden. In comparison to the way the hotel eviction is linked to meeting Giovanni temporally but not causally, it is linked to the first iteration of the Eden motif not in narrative temporality—the conversation occurs about a year later—but through narrative proximity—being recounted only a few pages later. After Giovanni's crime and sentencing, David runs into Jacques, the aging sugar daddy who attempts and fails to catch Giovanni after David drops him, and they reflect:

> "It might have been better," I said, "if he'd stayed down there in that village of his in Italy and planted his olive trees and had a lot of children and beaten his wife. He used to love to sing," I remembered suddenly, "maybe he could have stayed down there and sung his life away and died in bed."

> Then Jacques said something that surprised me. People are full of surprises, even for themselves, if they have been stirred enough. "Nobody can stay in the garden of Eden," Jacques said. And then: "I wonder why." […]
>
> I have thought about Jacques' question since. The question is banal but one of the real troubles with living is that living is so banal. Everyone, after all, goes the same dark road—and the road has a trick of being most dark, most treacherous, when it seems most bright—and it's true that nobody stays in the garden of Eden. Jacques' garden was not the same as Giovanni's, of course. Jacques' garden was involved with football players and Giovanni's was involved with maidens—but that seems to have made so little difference. Perhaps everybody has a garden of Eden, I don't know; but they have scarcely seen their garden before they see the flaming sword. (24-25)

The way David deploys stereotypes about Italians—planting olive trees, having a lot of children—and his offhanded assumption that all men beat their wives alert us that this is a normativized vision of life in the garden, not one unique or specific to Giovanni; in other words, David believes that Giovanni had the possibility of living out an idealized heteronormativity had he remained in his home village.

Giovanni himself has laid the foundation for David's belief, earlier in diegetic time but much later in the achronological narrative, in his own description:

> I have never known anyone like you before. I was never like this before you came. Listen. In Italy I had a woman and she was very good to me. She loved me, she loved *me*, and she took care of me and she was always there when I came in from work, in from the vineyards, and there was never any trouble between us, never. I was young then and did not know the things I learned later or the terrible things you have taught me. I thought all

> women were like that. I thought all men were like me—I thought I was like all other men. I was not unhappy then and I was not lonely—for she was there—and I did not want to die. I wanted to stay forever in our village and work in the vineyards and drink the wine we made and make love to my girl. (138)

Though Giovanni doesn't explicitly allude to Eden, he evokes its symbolic logic in his references to stasis ("always," "never," "forever"), immortality ("I did not want to die"), and the irrevocable loss of innocence involved in acquiring knowledge ("the things I learned later or the terrible things you have taught me"). Queer sexuality works on a temporal model of corruption ("I was never like this before you came") leading to expulsion, emphasizing that at birth, the member of civil society has the possibility of dwelling in paradisiacal normativity.

Jacques translates this lost possibility into explicit symbol in his response to David, "No one can stay in Eden. […] I wonder why." In the translation from Parisian hotel to garden of Eden, the eviction symbol becomes more specifically linked to sexuality, as evoked by Giovanni's "maidens" and Jacques' "football players." Jacques' proclivity for football players even in the days of his youth indicates that his particular form of degradation—using money to attract the favors of attractive younger men—is a loss of innocence relative to his starting point, an idealized admiration of other equally young men. Again, the symbol reveals that David sees members of civil society as having something to lose, or rather, fall away from, in the temporal process of going down "the same dark road."

The generalization of this model of normativity from the incident of David being thrown out of his apartment, to Giovanni's fall from his home village, to David's sexuality and life narrative is shown in the way David conceives of nationalism and futurity. Walking by the Seine, he reflects:

> Behind the walls of the houses I passed, the French nation was clearing away the dishes, putting little Jean Pierre and Marie to bed. […] Those walls, those shuttered windows held them in and protected them against the darkness and the long moan of this long night. Ten years hence, little Jean Pierre or Marie might find themselves out here beside the river and wonder, like me, how they had fallen out of the web of safety. What a long way, I thought, I've come—to be destroyed! […] I wanted to be inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman put my children to bed. (104)

White children are born into a structural position of innocence and safety, ensconced in the normative relations that structure white sexuality and af/filiation, but have the potential to "fall" out of the web.[13] Even the verb tenses David uses reflect the temporal model of queerness-as-failure. White French citizens abide in the timeless normativity of the progressive, "clearing away the dishes" and "watching [their] woman put [their] children to bed," and in the unchanging passive voice of "unquestioned manhood." Treasured white French children who end up with David beside the river will always *have* "fallen," in the perfect tense. The perfect tense insists upon the completion of an action or a change and insists upon the length of the distance

[13] In *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood*, Robin Bernstein analyzes the roots of the equation of childhood and innocence in nineteenth century material and performative culture. She argues, "Childhood innocence—itself raced white, itself characterized by the ability to retain racial meanings but hide them under claims of holy obliviousness—secured the unmarked status of whiteness, and the power derived from that status, in the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries. Childhood innocence provided a perfect alibi: not only the ability to remember while appearing to forget, but even more powerfully, the production of racial memory through the performance of forgetting. What childhood innocence helped Americans to assert by forgetting, to think about by performing obliviousness, was not only whiteness but also racial difference constructed against whiteness" (8). Bernstein's description of the whiteness of childhood innocence as a way to "remember while appearing to forget" is an apt description of David's narratorial blindspot toward black preclusion. The persistence of the association between innocence and white childhood in *Giovanni's Room* encourages us to extend Bernstein's analysis beyond the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

that David *has* "come—to be destroyed." David attempts to regain his place in the web by forsaking Giovanni in favor of Hella, but the imagery of falling reasserts itself with a vengeance when he finds himself no longer capable of being attracted to her: "When my fingers began, involuntarily, to loose their hold on Hella, I realized that I was dangling from a high place and that I had been clinging to her for my very life. With each moment, as my fingers slipped, I felt the roaring air beneath me and felt everything in me bitterly contracting, crawling furiously upward against that long fall" (158). In short, like the archetypal subject of queer theory, David sees himself as excluded from civil society for failing to conform to its norms of gender and sexuality.

One might expect a symbolic system based on the Eden eviction to obey a law-based logic rather than a norm-based one, since in the original story, the tenants Adam and Eve clearly commit a transgression against the singular (in fact, single) law of the sovereign landlord, God. But by making his Eden plural and its loss continual and social, Baldwin decentralizes power and makes the story about how members of civil society normativizingly regulate and punish each other—and themselves. Giovanni's description of his life in the village acknowledges that he is measuring himself and his wife against a society of Adams and Eves, rather than being the garden's sole inhabitants: "I thought all women were like that. I thought all men were like me—I thought I was like all other men" (138). He repetitively emphasizes that before leaving the village, he believed that all men and women perfectly embodied the same norms of gender and sexuality as he. By making the terms formally interchangeable, his chiasmic comparison between himself and other men emphasizes that normative power flows circuitously through members of civil society, rather than emanating from above.

David has already foreshadowed this decentralization when he says that "Jacques' garden was not the same as Giovanni's, of course," and "Perhaps everybody has a garden of Eden." Baldwin endows David with a blind spot toward the fact that even what he imagines to be Giovanni's singular garden, his heteronormative life in Italy, is not Giovanni's only garden. Giovanni sees his love and life with David as innocent, precious things to lose, unlike David, who sees them as precisely the instruments of contagion and decay that lead to the loss of his potential heterosexuality. The reader accesses this blind spot through Giovanni's own voice, when he loses his job and, fearing David is on the brink of leaving him for Hella, begs, "*Ne me laisse pas tomber, je t'en prie*" (105). ("Don't let me fall, I beg you.") Giovanni also comes to see Guillaume's seedy gay bar as its own type of Eden; narrating being fired from his post as barman there, he says, "I felt that I was falling, falling from a great, high place. […] I kept saying, what have I done? What have I *done*?" (108-09). As a member of civil society, Giovanni insists that he has the right to know upon what infraction his punishment is contingent. He makes a doomed attempt to return to this Eden the night of the murder for which he is punished by death. In David's imagination of the event, Guillaume is "in seventh heaven" (156) at the opportunity to exploit Giovanni's desperation by demanding sex, only to afterwards deny him the job after all, not realizing this will drive Giovanni to strangle him with the sash of his own dressing gown: "Then he simply held on, sobbing, becoming lighter every moment as Guillaume grew heavier, tightening the sash and cursing. Then Guillaume fell. And Giovanni fell—back into the room, the streets, the world, into the presence of the shadow of death" (157). The biblical figure of mortality, "shadow of death," confirms the Edenic logic within which Giovanni's fall functions. David's fantasized description of the sensations Giovanni feels in the moment of his execution cements this symbolic logic: "Then the door is before him. There is

darkness all around him, there is silence in him. Then the door opens and he stands alone, the whole world falling away from him. And the brief corner of the sky seems to be shrieking, though he does not hear a sound. Then the earth tilts, he is thrown forward on his face in darkness, and his journey begins" (168). Indeed, to echo Jacques, no one can remain in the Garden of Eden, whether it be David's vision of heteronormativity or Giovanni's love for David and his employment at the bar. In sum, the novel acknowledges that norms vary depending on context, and that their power depends on their performative function as exchanged and exercised between members of civil society rather than on their monolithicism. Nevertheless, Giovanni is embroiled in the normativity of civil society in his own fashion; the state of chaos in his room is a "matter of grief and punishment" (87), and he pays for his involvement with the gay milieu with his life.

If heteronormativity seems to David like such a desirable paradise, the novel asks, why leave it? It turns out that what looks like paradise from the outside feels like a trap or cage from the inside. David rejects his father's stifling, hyper-masculine, all-American lifestyle: "He thought we were alike. I did not want to think so. I did not want to think that my life would be like his, or that my mind would ever grow so pale, so without hard places and sharp, sheer drops" (17); "My father had money in his account which belonged to me but he was very reluctant to send it because he wanted me to come home—to come home, as he said, and settle down, and whenever he said that I thought of the sediment at the bottom of a stagnant pond" (22). As Kemp Williams notes, the novel's symbolic systems of entrapment and confinement, coded in rampant images of windows, mirrors, and the encroaching space of the titular room itself, have a double valence: David is both trying to escape his own homosexual compulsions, *and* trying to escape from the norms of civil society that criminalize these compulsions in the

first place. For example, Williams points out, on Giovanni's wallpaper, "a lady in a hoop skirt and a man in knee breeches perpetually walked together, hemmed in by roses" (86). This French eighteenth century Adam and Eve, "distant, archaic lovers trapped in an interminable rose garden" (87), represent the constrictions of being trapped in the garden of innocence, trapped in time, and trapped in monogamous heterosexuality. Meanwhile, David's forays outside of the trap of heteronormativity seem only to spring the trap, or catapult him into a different one: "It was not really so strange, so unprecedented, though voices deep within me boomed, For shame! For shame! that I should be so abruptly, so hideously entangled with a boy; what was strange was that this was but one tiny aspect of the dreadful human tangle occurring everywhere, without end, forever" (62). In other words, when he isn't suffering the constriction of living within society as a straight man, he suffers the pain of living marginally as a queer one, along with all the other humans embroiled in various degrees of "the dreadful human tangle occurring everywhere." What looks like a carefully woven web of safety from the outside is a dreadful human tangle when one is ensnared in it; the world "without end, forever" that describes the divine in a law-based sovereignty instead describes normativity in civil society. Heteronormativity totalizingly encompasses members of civil society, whether they suffer from acting out its rigorous demands or from the punishment—marginality, shame, exclusion—that attends failing to act them out. As a human entangled in civil society, ejected from the web of safety, alienated from his home country, expelled from the Garden of Eden, and evicted from his hotel room, David is intimately familiar with the process of queer failure and its attendant punishments and forms of suffering. However, his conception of the tangle of civil society as universal, "human," and totalizing blinds him to the experience of those who are excluded from

the tangle categorically, rather than contingently upon infraction, and it is to this blind spot that I now turn.

How can a protagonist's blind spot be devastatingly critiqued from within the formal constraints of first-person narration? How can a space outside of the narrator's own perspective be delineated by the author, unbeknownst to the narrator, within the narrator's own version of his story? In *Giovanni's Room*, the categorical exclusion of black political ontology from the normativity of civil society is registered through the text's omissions and ambiguities—deliberately crafted by Baldwin, repeated unconsciously and symptomatically by David.

These symptomatic omissions and ambiguities are most glaringly obvious in David's description of Joey, his childhood friend, his first sexual partner, and the only even debatably or ambiguously black character in the novel. David exhibits textbook symptoms of unreliable narration from the beginning of the episode, which he frames by confessing, "I repent now—for all the good it does—one particular lie among the many lies I've told, told, lived, and believed. This is the lie which I told to Giovanni but never succeeded in making him believe, that I had never slept with a boy before" (6). We are informed not only that our narrator is a frequent liar, but that he lives and believes the lies he tells, and therefore that his authority is compromised even when he is apparently making an earnest attempt to tell the truth. He admits, "I have not thought of that boy—Joey—for many years, but I see him quite clearly tonight. It was several years ago. […] So I forgot him. But I see him very well tonight" (6); later he muses, "To remember it so clearly, so painfully tonight tells me that I have never for an instant truly forgotten it" (8). The reader is cued to speculate on the epistemology of memory and reconstruction as David narrates in great detail an event he claims to have forgotten. There are, apparently, true and untrue ways to forget—some ways of forgetting undoubtedly motivated by

repression, guilt, and shame, by the desire to perceive one's self and the world differently. The cues to doubt David's narratorial authority continue when he reasons, "We must have gone to the movies. I can't think of any other reason for our going out and I remember walking down the dark, tropical Brooklyn streets […]. Odd to remember, for the first time in so long, how good I felt that night, how fond of Joey" (7). Looking beyond the classic epistemological problematics of the unreliable narrator, it is significant that the reader is cued most forcefully to doubt David's narration in the episode involving the only ambiguously black character in the novel; other episodes are narrated much more confidently, even when David speculatively recreates Giovanni's experience in the murder scene which David did not even witness.

The ambiguity of Joey's race is crucial. Baldwin takes care, throughout his oeuvre, to announce or insinuate the racial identity of almost every character in some obvious or subtle, but ultimately unambiguous, way. David, for example, mentions his own "blond hair" and "ancestors [who] conquered a continent" in the novel's first paragraph, broadcasting his whiteness (3). Not so with Joey. Instead, racially loaded yet contradictory markers accumulate around Joey as if to invite the reader's curiosity as to his race, but never satisfy it. By endowing his white narrator with a blindspot not only to the effects of blackness on the dynamics of nonnormative sexuality but even to the existence or nonexistence of blackness, Baldwin has his cake and eats it, too—David's description of Joey symptomatically reveals the antithesis between blackness and normativity and its palpable effects, while also enacting the absence of blackness from the field of vision of civil society.

This reading puts my analysis in tension with many of the recent black queer readings of *Giovanni's Room*, but particularly with Kathryn Bond Stockton's sensitive and provocative argument in *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*. Stockton writes, "Giovanni's darkness (as was

Joey's darkness) is […] a metaphorical blackness" (172). She describes David and Joey's interactions as "homosexual miscegenation" (171). Stockton is right to say that Baldwin "attempts to occupy white men's minds in order to think attraction through their thoughts" (153) but obscures crucial aspects of Baldwin's critique of white sexuality when she calls Giovanni's "darkness" a "seeming substitution of class for race, through which it appears that Baldwin writes a novel with no black characters" (168), and concludes, "We could call this genre the white man's slave narrative, in which the labor-against-one's-will (one's slave labor) is mental labor and one is captive to something (or someone) in the prison of one's own mind" (153). By reading for metaphor and substitution, Stockton opens up certain fruitful avenues through which to explore the text, but obscures others, on two fronts. On one front, as indicated by my analysis of white failure and black preclusion above, I think that to read Giovanni's Italian "darkness" as *blackness* obscures Baldwin's critique of the way anti-blackness sutures together all members of civil society, whether lily white or ethnicized Italian. On another front, I agree that Joey is in some ways coded as black, but in contrast to Stockton, I find it worthwhile to linger with the fact that this coding is ambiguous.

Let us, then, muster and assess this ambiguous racial evidence. Physical descriptions of Joey tend to imply blackness, while descriptions of socio-political institutions such as housing and education give heavily loaded clues in contradictory directions, and, finally, descriptions of the two boys' interactions in equally heavily loaded public contexts reveal either that Joey is not black, and therefore not subject to the gratuitous violence that attends public blackness, or that David is blind to the danger his friend experiences in these situations. Physically, Joey is described as "a very nice boy, too, very quick and dark, and always laughing" (6). In the night, he looks at David with "his mouth open and his dark eyes very big" (7). His constant laughter,

big, dark eyes, and mouth gaping in stupefaction evoke the stereotypes of blackness popularized by minstrel acts. The morning after, David says, "I awoke while Joey was still sleeping, curled like a baby on his side, toward me. He looked like a baby, his mouth half open, his cheek flushed, his curly hair darkening the pillow. […] Joey's body was brown, was sweaty" (8). Is this the dark curly hair and brown body of an ethnicized immigrant, or an African American? It is on the basis of these physical descriptions that Stockton concludes that Joey is essentially, if perhaps only metaphorically, black.

The socio-political institutions of housing and education are bristling with racial significance, and Baldwin plants a symptomatic silence on these topics in David's description of Joey. David is careful to note that while they both live in Brooklyn, he lives "in a better neighborhood than Joey's" (6). Does this simply mean that Joey's family is poorer than David's, or does it imply obliquely that the two boys' neighborhoods are separated by the infamous red line of New York City housing segregation? After carefully making clear that they are in Joey's neighborhood, not his own, David describes, "I remember walking down the dark, tropical Brooklyn streets with heat coming up from the pavements and banging from the walls of houses with enough force to kill a man, with all the world's grownups, it seemed, sitting shrill and dishevelled on the stoops and all the world's children on the sidewalks or in the gutters or hanging from fire escapes" (7). The "dark, tropical Brooklyn streets," "banging" with deadly heat, primitivistically insinuate a hint of the African rainforest, while the image of stoops overpopulated by adults could be an exaggeration of black front porch culture, and the proliferation of children playing in the gutter or hanging from fire escapes evokes stereotypes of black hyper-fertility. While the streets themselves are "dark," however, David omits any explicit mention of the color of the bodies that inhabit them.

Just as David's description of Joey's neighborhood suggests the geography of racial segregation without clarifying on which side of the red line Joey's house falls, his mentions of education are made in a racially loaded but ultimately ambiguous context. Baldwin wrote the novel immediately following the anti-segregation decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, and published it in 1956, with the implications of that decision still resounding in the minds of his readers but its promise not even begun to be implemented. The characters, therefore, very likely attend segregated schools.[14] At the beginning of his reminiscence, David mentions, "It was in the summer, there was no school" (6). This suspends the question of whether they attend the same school, setting the stage for the scavenger hunt for racial evidence throughout the episode. Indeed, the summer, suspended outside of the racially overdetermined environment of the school, is *the* operative increment of time of the episode, diegetically and textually. The episode takes place over the course of the summer, and references to summer bookend its narration. It is the episode's closing remark in which the suspension of the segregated social world of high school education ends with an indication that Joey is white, like David. After the night they have sex, David decides, in fear and shame, to leave abruptly and cut off his association with Joey:

[14] In *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York City Public Schools*, Diane Ravitch describes the findings of a 1954 *New York Times* "survey of Negro living conditions in the city" that paints a picture of the state of school segregation immediately prior to the decision in *Brown v. Board*: "Although the city and the state had laws forbidding discrimination, Negroes still encountered gross discrimination in housing and employment, as well as de facto segregation in many public schools. Because Negroes were excluded from most private housing, they clustered in large numbers in Harlem and in sections of the Bronx, Brooklyn, and, to a much lesser extent, Queens. Where there were slums, there were slum schools, old (like the neighborhood) and overcrowded (like the neighborhood)" (241). Since schools were neighborhood-based, the question of whether David lives in "a better neighborhood than Joey's" or in "our neighborhood" *with* Joey is crucial—and unresolved.

> Then I, who had seen him that summer nearly every day till then, no longer went to see him. He did not come to see me. I would have been very happy to see him if he had, but the manner of my leave-taking had begun a constriction, which neither of us knew how to arrest. When I finally did see him, more or less by accident, near the end of the summer, I made up a long and totally untrue story about a girl I was going with and when school began again I picked up with a rougher, older crowd and was very nasty to Joey. And the sadder this made him, the nastier I became. He moved away at last, out of our neighborhood, away from our school, and I never saw him again. (9-10)

One single word, the first person plural possessive in the phrase "our school," seems to indicate definitively that the two boys attend the same school, and therefore that Joey most likely shares David's whiteness. But David also refers here to "our neighborhood," while he has previously described himself as living in "a better neighborhood than Joey's" (6). This discrepancy gives us reason to doubt our narrator, and particularly to question his obliviousness to the structural anti-blackness of public institutions.

This potential obliviousness becomes more acute in the context of David's descriptions of the boys' public interactions. The boys (perhaps) spend the day before their night of sexual consummation at the beach:

> I think we had been lying around the beach, swimming a little and watching the near-naked girls pass, whistling at them and laughing. I am sure that if any of the girls we whistled at that day had shown any signs of responding, the ocean would not have been deep enough to drown our shame and terror. But the girls, no doubt, had some intimation of this, possibly from the way we whistled, and they ignored us. (6)

David reminds the reader not to trust him by introducing the beach scene with the phrase "I think," but then changes his tune, regaining his confidence in the phrases "I am sure" and "no doubt." We suspect that the narrator doth protest too much, that he is trying to convince himself of one of the lies that he tells, lives, and believes. In David's version, he and Joey are harmless children like little Jean-Pierre and Marie, caught and held in the web of safety, publicly performing their heteronormativity. Rather than being combatants in an antagonism between sexes, the girls seem to David to participate in, or at least ignore, their own harassment with a knowing, sympathetic intimacy, tolerantly allowing the boys to test their wings in fledgling participation in the heteronormative dynamics of civil society.

Can Joey reflect on his and David's harassment of "near-naked girls" as innocently and blithely as David does? The answer depends entirely upon his race. If he "is" white, he may well remember the events just as David thinks, is sure, doesn't doubt, tells, lives, and believes them to have been. If he "is" black, and the girls are white, his ocean-deep "shame and terror" are not the nostalgic hyperbole of David romanticizing his lost boyhood, but rather the shame of breaking the cultural taboo against interracial sexual contact between black men and white women, and the terror of the material, violent, potentially deadly retribution inflicted on black men who violate it so publicly. As Stockton reminds, this violent retribution was spectacularized in August 1955, shortly before the publication of *Giovanni's Room*, in the brutal murder and circulation of the photograph of the corpse of Emmett Till, a fourteen year old black boy who was killed by white men in Mississippi after allegedly cat-calling or addressing a white woman as "baby" in a grocery store. (Stockton does not, however, address David and Joey's cat-calling specifically, or allow this detail to alter her reading of Joey as black based on his physical description.)

Baldwin overtly describes the shame and terror of this moment of interracial contact in other novels, most extensively in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968)[15]. The narrator, Leo, as a boy even younger than Joey, is aware of the violence that structures his positionality. Going to the movies with his older brother, Caleb, in a racially mixed crowd, he says, "I kept my hands in my pockets (and so did Caleb) so I could not be accused of molesting any of the women who jostled past, and kept my eyes carefully expressionless so I could not be accused of lusting after the women, or desiring the death of the men" (225). Leo's public performance of sexuality is regulated not by fear of representational or social/political marginalization contingent upon infractions against norms, but rather by awareness that any slight engagement—removing his hands from his pockets, or allowing any expression to enter his eyes—could precipitate the material, bodily violence inherent in the encounter between his black flesh and white female bodies. Years later, Leo drunkenly has sex with a white woman, and upon waking describes, "I was terribly, terribly afraid. I knew that something awful was going to happen. And there was nothing I could do and there was no place to run. Here I was, in this white cunt's bed; here I was, ready for the slaughter; here I was, I, Judas, with a stiffening prick and windy heart, lost, doomed, terrified, alone" (200). His sense of terror is clear; a sense of shame also comes through in his repetition of the phrase "here I was," blaming himself for being "in this white cunt's bed," for being a traitor or "Judas" to his race, for feeling desire still ("with a stiffening prick"). As he leaves Madeleine's apartment, he encounters a couple of white residents who challenge his presence, to whom he responds sarcastically; when he is later

[15] For another example, Ernesto Javier Martinez gives a sensitive account of the shame, terror, and self-regulation of Rufus, a black man in an interracial relationship in *Another Country*, in his *On Making Sense* (53-56).

arrested, before finding out it was they who alerted the cops to a suspicious black man in town, he thinks:

> *A colored boy. They arrested a colored boy.* I became faint, and hot and cold with terror. It was in vain that I told myself, Leo, this isn't the South. I knew better than to place any hope in the accidents of North American geography. This was America, America, America, and those people out there, my countrymen, had been tearing me limb from limb, like dogs, for centuries. I would not be the first. In the bloody event, I would not be the last. I thought, I wonder if Madeleine has charged me with rape? But, no, I thought, don't you have to be caught in the act? Then I thought, No. They just need Miss Ann's word. (253)

In an instance of double consciousness, Leo is caught between identification as "a colored boy" and an American man—he briefly fantasizes that he is a citizen with rights, that he must be "caught in the act" before he can be punished for infraction. He realizes, however, that the antiblackness of American political ontology has not been fundamentally altered since the plantation days evoked by the slang term "Miss Ann." In this sense, one half of his double consciousness is fantasmatic—he realizes that his identification with his "countrymen" can only be ironic, foreclosed by his structural vulnerability to gratuitous violence. Both halves of the compound word "countrymen" resonate ironically, as his claim to Americanness is undercut by his lack of due process rights and his claim to masculinity undercut by the repetition, "*a colored boy*." I will return to the violence that attends interactions between black men and white women in the next chapter. For now, suffice it to say that if Joey of *Giovanni's Room* "is" black, his experience of the "shame and terror" of cat-calling "near-naked girls" is categorically different from David's experience; if we trust David not to have either misrepresented events or

misreported Joey's relation to them, then we conclude that the boys' public interactions furnish evidence that Joey "is" not black.

There is, of course, no object of truth beyond the contradictions of the text; Joey is entirely a textual creation, and therefore black and non-black at the same time. By making his narrator "colorblind," Baldwin turns the reader into a detective, hunting for clues to racial identity like a phrenologist, comparative anatomist, or one trying to detect a black person passing for white through what Nella Larsen's Irene describes as "the most ridiculous means, finger-nails, palms of hands, shapes of ears, teeth, and other equally silly rot" (11). Like blackness in the real world, which has no inevitable, genetic essence yet is revealed as an ontological fact through the accumulations and distributions of history, materiality, and violence, Joey's race is imperceptible to David's universalizing gaze, yet is registered through the symptomatic effects of Joey's negation and preclusion from normativity. These symptomatic effects emerge clearly if we read the text with the assumption, warranted by his physical description, suggested by the description of his neighborhood, yet disallowed by his schooling and his public interactions, that Joey "is" black.

Read with the assumption that Joey "is" black, and that indications to the contrary are symptoms of David's colorblindness, the episode of David's defloration provides an example of black preclusion that contrasts with white imbrication in the web of normativity implied by the necessity of ventriloquizing a white protagonist in order to describe such a web. David says, "For a while he was my best friend. Later, the idea that such a person *could* have been my best friend was proof of some horrifying taint in me" (6). Until David relates the story of their sexual experience, the "horrifying taint" of being Joey's friend could be construed as referring to his race; even once their sexual experience is described, David is only worried about whether he

himself is "tainted" by Joey, and does not endow Joey with the capacity to be tainted by the experience in return. David briefly opens himself to a seemingly mutual interaction with Joey in his description of their sexual encounter: "But this time when I touched him something happened in him and in me which made this touch different from any touch either of us had ever known"; "I was very frightened; I am sure he was frightened too, and we shut our eyes"; "we gave each other joy that night" (7-8). Even in this moment of fleeting mutuality, it is important to note that Joey's thoughts and feelings are recorded as imagined by an unreliable narrator, who is "sure" that Joey shares his fear and has never known a desiring, homoerotic touch before, but who never actually overcomes his fear enough to see Joey as an interlocutor and discuss the events between them.

The morning after, David returns to his place in the web of normativity and leaves his mutual experience with Joey behind in the realm of the resolutely nonnormative; he resumes the assumption of a categorical difference between himself and Joey:

> But that lifetime was short, was bounded by that night—it ended in the morning. I awoke while Joey was still sleeping, curled like a baby on his side, toward me. He looked like a baby, his mouth half open, his cheek flushed, his curly hair darkening the pillow and half hiding his damp round forehead and his long eyelashes glinting slightly in the summer sun. We were both naked and the sheet we had used as a cover was tangled around our feet. Joey's body was brown, was sweaty, the most beautiful creation I had ever seen till then. I would have touched him to wake him up but something stopped me. I was suddenly afraid. Perhaps it was because he looked so innocent lying there, with such perfect trust; perhaps it was because he was so much smaller than me; my own body suddenly seemed gross and crushing and the desire which was rising in me seemed

> monstrous. But, above all, I was suddenly afraid. It was borne in on me: *But Joey is a boy*. (8-9)

What promises to be a "lifetime" of nonnormativity for Joey is "bounded by that night" for David—or, at least, David attempts to make it so; every subsequent time he succumbs to the pleasures of homosexuality, he sees it as a lapse or infraction from which he struggles to recover. Joey is static, asleep, oblivious to the changes taking place in David, like a baby that never ages, with his mouth perpetually "half-open," "so innocent, with such perfect trust." As we shall see in a later detour, Baldwin theorizes there to be an irreconcilable difference between black and white boyhood; the innocence that is so appealing to David is damning to Joey. David's sudden realization, "*But Joey is a boy*," has a triple resonance: Joey is male, therefore their sexual acts are nonnormative; Joey is a child, innocent in comparison to David's guilt; and Joey is black, to be perpetually referred to as "boy" rather than "man." While Joey remains in stasis, a terrible change comes over David:

> I saw suddenly the power in thighs, in his arms, and in his loosely curled fists. The power and the promise and the mystery of that body made me suddenly afraid. That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood. Precisely, I wanted to know that mystery and feel that power and have that promise fulfilled through me. The sweat on my back grew cold. I was ashamed. The very bed, in its sweet disorder, testified to vileness. […] A cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words. I thought I saw my future in the cavern. I was afraid. I could have cried, cried for shame and terror, cried for not understanding how this could have happened to me, how this could have happened *in* me. (9)

David repeats the word "suddenly" six times within seven sentences, all with reference to the change that has happened "to" and "*in*" him; this is a far cry from the mutuality of his earlier statement, "something happened in him and in me" (8). In the aftermath, it is David who will be tortured while Joey sleeps peacefully; it is David who has manhood, sanity, and a future to lose in the cavern, to whom and in whom things happen suddenly, while Joey is unchanged by the experience; apparently having nothing to lose, Joey is figured as a cavernous backdrop to the torture and loss David suffers. David deprives Joey of the capacity to have a similar experience by dressing before Joey awakes and leaving before they have breakfast, forever abandoning their friendship and eventually fleeing to Paris to attempt to escape its taint. Joey, the novel's only even ambiguously black character, provides a counter-example to David's white model of sexuality organized around infraction and punishment, illustrating why it is necessary to adopt the voice of a white man to do what Stockton calls "occupy white men's minds in order to think attraction through their thoughts"—that is, to think attraction as participation in civil society.

David has said, "I was still in my teens, he was about my age, give or take a year" (6). A detour through an essay from Baldwin's 1961 collection *Nobody Knows My Name* illuminates the categorical difference between black and white boyhood that is implicit in the interaction between David and Joey. In the essay "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," Baldwin compares himself to Norman Mailer (with whom, the essay reveals, he had a vexed and ambivalent friendship) as a way to allegorize the structural positions, "black boy" and "white boy," that he identifies in the essay's title:

> There is a difference, though, between Norman and myself in that I think he still imagines that he has something to save, whereas I have never had anything to lose. Or, perhaps I ought to put it another way: the thing that most white people imagine that they

> can salvage from the storm of life is really, in sum, their innocence. It was this commodity precisely which I had to get rid of at once, literally, on pain of death. I am afraid that most of the white people I have ever known impressed me as being in the grip of a weird nostalgia, dreaming of a vanished state of security and order, against which dream, unfailingly and unconsciously, they tested and very often lost their lives. It is a terrible thing to say, but I am afraid that for a very long time the troubles of white people failed to impress me as being real trouble. They put me in mind of children crying because the breast has been taken away. (270)

To paraphrase, the white boy has a sense of possession and loss, "something to save," while the black boy feels only absence, "nothing to lose."[16] The structural antagonism between black and white gives "innocence" a double meaning. On one hand, it is a state of prelapsarian innocence, imagined as perfect, non-conflictual conformity to the norms of civil society in a "state of security and order," which white subjects attempt to "salvage from the storm of life." To call civil society a "web of safety" does not mean that those enmeshed in it are actually absolutely safe from harm; the very norms that ostensibly ensure safety from the menaces of the "other" actually dole out physical, psychological, and representational harm to the elements of

[16] Baldwin's language of loss and nothingness is transmuted into a theoretical, psychoanalytic register by David Marriott's analysis of the evacuation of the black psyche by the white imago: "It may not be too fanciful to suggest that the black ego, far from being too immature or weak to integrate, is an absence haunted by its and others' negativity. In this respect, the memory of a loss is its only possible communication. Yet if there are no witnesses to offer atonement for, or deny, or prevent, the internal and external injury of intruding phobias, could such mourning ever console those black mourners left to mourn? In these circumstances, having a white unconscious may be the only way to connect with—or even contain—the overwhelming and irreparable sense of loss. The intruding fantasy offers the medium to connect with the lost internal object, the ego, but there is also no 'outside' to this 'real fantasy,' and the effects of intrusion are irreparable" (*Haunted* 219). In other words, while the white boy may experience a loss of ego contingent upon traumatic experience, having "something to save," the black boy experiences a loss of ego so instant ("at once, literally, on pain of death") that it can only be considered an absence, "nothing to lose."

nonnormative otherness *within and constitutive of* civil society. This is why Baldwin calls white innocence a "dream" against which "most of the white people I have ever known […] tested and very often lost their lives." The difference is between contingent and gratuitous vulnerability to violence; the image of "testing" their lives against the dream of innocence implies that punishment and even death for the white boy are contingent upon infractions of the "state of security and order."

Not so for the black boy, which brings us to the second meaning of innocence in the passage, "this commodity precisely which I had to get rid of at once, literally, on pain of death." Innocence exists for the black boy only as a menace, a possibility of safety for others that is simultaneously a deadly threat to him. This formulation also contains a *double entendre* in which innocence is not only the opposite of guilt (as in the world of infraction and punishment), but also the opposite of knowledge; to be naively innocent or childlike in perceiving the violence that structures the world is the privilege of infantile white boys, who, when they do finally encounter "troubles," will resemble "children crying because the breast has been taken away." The metaphor of white men as perpetual "children," or "boys," sheds some light on the essay's title, indicating that although there is a surface parallelism between the "black boy" and the "white boy," only in the latter case does the word "boy" evoke the innocence of youth; in the former case, since the black "boy" has gotten rid of his youthful innocence "at once, literally, on pain of death," we are left to surmise that "black boy" instead carries connotations of the colloquial habit of disrespectfully addressing a fully grown black man as "boy." The adjective "literally" refers ambiguously to getting rid of innocence "at once," which emphasizes that this loss is truly an absence, gone before it even materializes—if you "get rid of" something "at once, literally," did you ever actually possess it? "Literally" can also ambiguously be read as

modifying “on pain of death,” in which case it emphasizes that this is not merely a representational or metaphorical threat, but a constant vulnerability to physical violence. While the phrase “on pain of death” seems to indicate that the infliction of the death penalty is contingent upon the black boy’s actions or failures to act, it turns out that to avoid certain death, the action the black boy must take is “precisely” to exclude himself from the very dream of innocence that enables and shelters life in the first place. To escape certain death, he must enter into a state of social death and categorical vulnerability to gratuitous violence that may well lead to physical death anyway.

Published in 1961 in the “early” phase of Baldwin’s career, which critics describe as Baldwin’s more humanist, less nationalist work, this passage nevertheless foreshadows precisely the argument that Baldwin makes in the 1984 *Village Voice* interview from whence this chapter derives its epigraph. This argument can be paraphrased as the thesis of this chapter: that white subjects are embroiled in a system of normativity comprised of rewards and punishments, from which they are excluded in a temporalized process, contingently upon infraction, while the position of blackness is categorically excluded from participation in normativity in the first place. This argument describes a fundamental antagonism between black and white political ontology more characteristic of an unflinching black nationalist assessment than a humanist or civil rights perspective. It also echoes throughout Baldwin’s fiction, from Leo’s panicked thought, “*They arrested a colored boy*,” to David’s realization, “*But Joey is a boy*.” Being a black boy with nothing to lose puts the “brown” Joey in stark contrast with the “dark” Giovanni, who begs David not to let him fall, and the “blond” David, who longs to be back inside the web of safety.

So the critics who argue that Baldwin writes about white characters to gain the "freedom" to talk about homosexuality are, strangely and unexpectedly, somewhat vindicated. Baldwin *does* have to write about white characters in order to write about the model of queerness-as-failure, which is distinct to the white characters in the book. The great drama of David's failure to conform and subsequent abjection from the web of safety of civil society is played out against a backdrop of Joey's preclusion from being enmeshed in the web in the first place. Even when the web of safety is itself experienced as constraint, unfreedom, and oppression, and when abjection from it results in loss, danger, and marginality, there is a crucial structural difference between white failure within and black preclusion from the web of safety.

Chapter Three:

"Get Up and Die": Lynch Sexuality in Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*

As the first chapter looked back to the kinlessness of slavery to understand nonnormative sexuality in contemporary neo-slave narratives, this chapter asks why the violence of lynching continues to haunt black American literature after the ostensible "end" of the era of lynching. Post-World War II literature insists that sexuality, as generated in the post-bellum era as a way of proliferating the possible existences and narratives of non-black people and foreclosing into nonnormativity the existences and narratives of newly emancipated black people, is categorically violent rather than exceptionally so. In Chapter Two, I discussed an offhand remark made by James Baldwin's character Leo Proudhammer from *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, upon venturing into the mixed race space of Madison Square Garden: "I kept my hands in my pockets (and so did Caleb) so I could not be accused of molesting any of the women who jostled past, and kept my eyes carefully expressionless so I could not be accused of lusting after the women, or desiring the death of the men" (225). This remark reflects a paranoid awareness of what David Marriott calls "an identification between blackness and sexual guilt" (*On Black Men* 9) in Leo's fear of being perceived as molesting or lusting after white women; to this I add the observation of the frequency with which the trope of the rape of white women is paired with the killing of white men. With its precise reversal of the truth about which bodies are categorically vulnerable to rape and murder, and which bodies commit rape and murder with impunity, this double assumption reflects the inextricability of sex and violence in constituting racial antagonism. The very offhandedness of Leo's remark is itself remarkable; it reveals that Leo and

his brother, Caleb, when quite young, understand that the assumption that they are always about to rape a white woman or kill a white man categorically structures their existence as black men. Why should this novel from 1968, set not in the South but in New York City, show the way the threat of lynching affects the most intimate movements and thoughts of two young boys? And what can we learn about sexuality, violence, race, and political economy from a consideration of lynching and its literary afterlife?

According to commentators both historical and contemporary, aspects of slavery persisted after 1865 in many forms, including sharecropping, the chain gang, Jim Crow segregation, and lynching. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois writes, "[T]his much all men know: despite compromise, war, and struggle, the Negro is not free" (34). In this chapter, I focus particularly on four aspects of one of those afterlives of slavery, lynching. Firstly, lynching represents a permutation of the categorical vulnerability to gratuitous violence that characterizes slavery. Secondly, the logic of lynching epitomizes the mutual constitution of violence and sexuality inscribed into political economy. Lynching was not an extralegal, regional aberration, but a continuation of the quintessentially modern condition of white supremacy and a foundation of American political ontology. Further, the sexual, anti-black violence of lynch logic is directly related to the proliferation and etiologization of non-black sexualities that Foucault describes as occurring in the late nineteenth century; I argue that it is not coincidental that this development in sexuality occurs in the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction eras. To the extent that our modern understanding of sexuality derives from that era, the logic of lynching persists. Finally and, for my purposes, most importantly, I show that post-World War II literature allegorizes the ongoing psychic, material, and political structures of lynch sexuality.

A deeply historical study of lynching is beyond the scope of this dissertation; my focus is on deciphering the paradigmatic logic behind lynching that continues to structure violence, sexuality, and political ontology as revealed in post-World War II literature. I rely on the archival research and respond to the theoretical implications of Jacqueline Goldsby's formidable contribution, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature*, in which she argues that

> a paradox concerning lynching's history at the end of the century remains unaddressed. On the one hand, anti-black mob murders intersected quite frequently with the technologies and temperament at work in national cultural developments. On the other hand, lynching's relation to modernity's evolution in the United States has been persistently disavowed. (26)

Goldsby convincingly identifies lynching as a hallmark of, rather than a contradiction to, American modernity, although she focuses on the nineteenth century as the era of modernization, and her insights could be extended by broadening her conception of the time scale on which anti-black violence defines modernity. Certain unique features of lynching—its categorical anti-blackness, its gratuitousness, its imbrication with nonnormative sexuality—make it a constitutive, paradigmatic form of violence, akin to slavery, that defines the modern era.

Lynching began to assume its modern form during Reconstruction, and became a dominant form of violence against black people around 1882, shortly after the last vestiges of radical Republican Reconstruction lost power in the South in 1877. Between 1882 and 1930, at least 3,220 black people were lynched in the South (ctd. in Goldsby 15)[17]. Lynching played a crucial role in the maintenance of white supremacy after the legal end of slavery by

[17] The actual number may be much higher than this; in *A Red Record*, Wells calculates that ten thousand lynchings occurred just between the years 1865 and 1895 (222).

spectacularizing the continued vulnerability of black people to gratuitous violence. Angela Davis summarizes, “The institution of lynching, in turn, complemented by the continued rape of Black women, became an essential ingredient of the postwar strategy of racist terror. In this way the brutal exploitation of Black labor was guaranteed, and after the betrayal of Reconstruction, the political domination of the Black people as a whole was assured” (185). Ida B. Wells was among the first to note the fundamental continuity within the shifting forms of anti-black violence; in *A Red Record* she writes,

> Beginning with the emancipation of the Negro, the inevitable result of unbridled power exercised for two and a half centuries, by the white man over the Negro, began to show itself in acts of conscienceless outlawry. During the slave regime, the Southern white man owned the Negro body and soul. It was to his interest to dwarf the soul and preserve the body. Vested with unlimited power over his slave, to subject him to any and all kinds of physical punishment, the white man was still restrained from such punishment as tended to injure the slave by abating his physical powers and thereby reducing his financial worth. While slaves were scourged mercilessly, and in countless cases inhumanly treated in other respects, still the white owner rarely permitted his anger to go so far as to take a life, which would entail upon him a loss of several hundred dollars. The slave was rarely killed, he was too valuable; it was easier and quite as effective, for discipline or revenge, to sell him "Down South."
>
> But Emancipation came and the vested interests of the white man in the Negro's body were lost. The white man had no right to scourge the emancipated Negro, still less has he a right to kill him. But the Southern white people had been educated so long in that school of practice, in which might makes right, that they disdained to draw strict

> lines of action in dealing with the Negro. In slave times the Negro was kept subservient and submissive by the frequency and severity of the scourging, but, with freedom, a new system of intimidation came into vogue; the Negro was not only whipped and scourged; he was killed. (221)

Wells argues that the profit motives of whites have resulted in a shift in the deployment of anti-black gratuitous violence, which she calls "unbridled power," "unlimited power," or "that school of practice, in which might makes right," but not its end.

In addition to representing the perpetuation of gratuitous violence, lynching also has a particular relationship to modern forms of power and sovereignty. Wells's argument registers the shift from slavery as an individualized (albeit racialized) condition to Jim Crow and lynching as a collective subordination. Patterson describes, "Another feature of the coercive aspect of slavery is its individualized condition: the slave was usually powerless in relation to another individual. […] In his powerlessness the slave became an extension of his master's power" (4). Given his comparative, transhistorical framework, Patterson may overlook some of the collective aspects of American chattel slavery, which was racial and structural in scope. In the United States, for example, poor whites gained a structural position that authorized them to inflict violence in the capacity of patrollers or overseers. Nevertheless, in a limited sense, his conception of the individualized nature of slavery does shed light on the shift Wells describes between the different vulnerabilities of black people under regimes of individualized profit motives and collective political domination. How did the categorical vulnerability of black people to gratuitous violence—"the coercive aspect of slavery"—survive the shift from this individualized coercion to the collective, mass-circulated subordination of the postbellum era? As Wells writes, with emancipation, "the vested interests of the white man in the Negro's body were lost." With the

loss of individualized vested interests, white men also lost the profit incentive to preserve the life of the body. Scholars widely agree that slavery became racialized in colonial America partly as a bribe to gain the allegiance of poor whites for a system that was not always economically in their favor; but with the end of chattel slavery, poor whites not only retained the symbolic advantages of race in the form of Jim Crow segregation, but also *gained* the license to murder black people with impunity in the form of lynching, a power over life and death formerly reserved, except in exceptional circumstances like rebellion or escape, for white slave owners who held "vested interests […] in the Negro's body."

The continuity of gratuitous violence within the shift from individualized to collective racial domination gives us insight into modern forms of power and sovereignty. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that the "spectacle of torture" (3) characterized the treatment of criminals under monarchies, in which a violation of the law was a direct infraction against the sovereign and had to be met with excessive, spectacular results in order to reaffirm the sovereign's absolute power. When sovereignty shifted from being embodied in a monarch to being collectively diffused among "the people," beginning roughly during the eighteenth century, the spectacle of torture was superseded by the systematic regimes of punishment and discipline in the prison system. An infraction against the law was now understood to be an infraction against the people, of which the criminal him/herself was a member; therefore, punishment was intended to rehabilitate the criminal and allow her/him to rejoin the sovereign group. Foucault overlooks the fact that as white people became exempt from the fate of the "branded, dismembered, burnt, annihilated body of the tortured criminal" (354) black people became vulnerable *as a race* to precisely that system of spectacular torture, in the form of the practices of branding and exemplary scourging in slavery and the burning, dismemberment,

torture, mutilation, and annihilation of lynching. While "the people" replaced the monarch as sovereign *within* white political ontology, in another register, the white race exercised sovereignty over the black race and used the spectacle of torture to maintain this racial political ontology.

The resemblance between lynching and a monarch's punishment of a subject was not lost on contemporary observers, who described the violence of lynching as "medieval," "feudalistic," or "savage" (Goldsby 19, 21, 26). In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois writes, "Inter-racial sex jealousy and accompanying sadism has been made the wide foundation of mobs and lynching. […] Such evils led to widespread violence in the South, to murder and mobs. Probably in no country in the civilized world did human life become so cheap. [… T]he South reached the extraordinary distinction of being the only modern civilized country where human beings were publicly burned alive" (699-700). Du Bois emphasizes the South's exceptionality—its "extraordinary distinction"—within the category of "the civilized world," *without* excluding it from that category. Although he appears to confine the violence to the South, he wavers between regional and national responsibility when he calls the South "the only modern civilized country" where lynching occurs. With the word "publicly," he distinguishes between secret, individual crimes and the political, spectacular, permitted violence of lynching. Repeatedly using the word "human" to describe the victims of lynching and mob violence, he deliberately refuses the knowledge that lynching is a mechanism for ejecting black people from humanity. All in all, he identifies the torture of lynching as an uncivilized form of violence that is nevertheless publicly, systemically, life-cheapeningly practiced in the civilized world.

This is *not* to say that lynching is a mere holdover or regression to pre-modern forms of governmentality. As Goldsby argues, to cast lynching as an atavistic remnant, or reflection of the

South's backwardness, is to disavow its foundational role in modern politics; she writes, "[L]ynching thrived at the turn of the new century not because the violence was endemic to the South's presumed retrograde relation to the new developments that constituted modernity in America. Rather, I contend that anti-black mob murders flourished as registers of the nation's ambivalences attending its nascent modernism" (24). Goldsby points to violent contemporary trends in labor exploitation, immigration restrictions, and indigenous genocide as other hallmarks of the American turn of the last century that created a "cultural logic" that sanctioned lynching; I would suggest that lynching is also intrinsically modern in a longer timeframe in the way it continues the violence of slavery that formed modern political economy, and intrinsically modern in the structural way it draws the boundaries of civil society to exclude blackness. As Goldsby acknowledges, there is a critical consensus that lynching functioned to perpetuate white supremacy and terrorize black people. In the passages cited above, both Wells and Du Bois identify lynching as a structural foundation of American political economy at the same time that they decry its savage and uncivilized nature.

But can a practice be a structural foundation of political economy if it is a crime, an extralegal act of vigilantism? Goldsby describes how the ostensible definition of lynching as extralegal or vigilante action is belied by the laws and court cases that disenfranchised and eliminated the citizenship rights of newly freed black people. She writes:

> African Americans were terrorized and murdered with impunity because they had been excluded from the legal and moral frameworks that defined national citizenship at the end of the nineteenth century. Paradoxically, the U.S. Supreme Court's rulings in the *Slaughterhouse* (1873), *Cruikshank* (1876), *Civil Rights* (1883), and *Plessy* (1896) cases made emancipated blacks more vulnerable to mob assault from any and all quarters,

> precisely because these new laws and public policies conceded the point that made lynching an actionable crime. By nullifying African Americans' rights of citizenship and, with them, the affirmative duty to protect black people from unjust harm, the federal government effectively granted mobs a license to kill. […] Though contemporary commentators insisted otherwise […] by the end of the nineteenth century there was nothing *extra*legal about the mob murders of African Americans. Lynching functioned as a tool of domination meant to coerce (and not rough-handedly correct), to deny (and not merely restrict), and to subjugate (not only banish or dispatch) black people, depriving them of the political, economic, social, and cultural opportunities promised by emancipation. (17-18)

The causality is not unidirectional here; if the Supreme Court granted impunity to white mobs and nullified black citizenship rights on the one hand, the violence of lynching spectacularly ejected black people from civil society and made the logic of the Supreme Court's decisions thinkable, on the other. In any case, lynching and law went hand in hand in perpetuating the anti-blackness at the foundation of modern political ontology that began during slavery. The set of parallel distinctions Goldsby makes above—between coercing and correcting, denying and restricting, and subjugating and banishing—makes it clear that lynching was a categorical and gratuitous form of violence, not one contingent on any individual's infraction of the law, and not one meant to discipline, punish, and rehabilitate a sovereign member of civil society.

Lynching also forcefully demonstrates the inseparability of race and sexuality in the constitution of blackness. As Angela Davis explains in *Women, Race & Class*, the most generalized (and almost always fabricated) justification for lynching was the accusation of attempted or completed rape of a white woman by a black man. Lynching was often

accompanied by castration or other forms of genital torture. The irony of the connection between the fantasmatic, willfully false accusation of rape and the very real violence of lynching has been thoroughly dissected, from Ida B. Wells's pamphlets *Southern Horrors* (1892) and *A Red Record* (1895) to David Marriott's contemporary work on the topic in *On Black Men*. Of the widely-known fraudulence of the rape charges that justified lynching, which he describes as "ideological narratives, or fantasies, of black men as murderers, rapists, thieves" (10), Marriott writes, "In other words, the act of lynching is part of a racial imaginary, a primal scene of racist culture in the southern states of America, in which black men bear the brunt of a hatred which seems, at times, to know no bounds" (10). Wells particularly cites cases in which interracial sexual contact *does* occur, but consensually—or, if coercively, in the form of a white woman coercing a black man, rather than the reverse:

> The miscegenation laws of the South only operate against the legitimate union of the races; they leave the white man free to seduce all the colored girls he can, but it is death to the colored man who yields to the force and advances of a similar attraction in white women. White men lynch the offending Afro-American, not because he is a despoiler of virtue, but because he succumbs to the smiles of white women. (62)

In contrast to many critics and commentators, who simply dismiss the rape charge as fraudulent and stop the discussion of sexuality there, Wells's description is interesting for in acknowledging that the black man sometimes "succumbs to the smiles of white women," it reveals that there is no normative way for sexual contact to occur between black men and white women. The coercion and violence of the rape accusation are wielded by the white woman and attributed to the black man as structural positions regardless of the actual circumstance. For this reason, I describe the violent and political functions of lynching as "lynch sexuality," refusing to dismiss

the role of sexuality in lynching even though it is certainly true that the justification of lynching as a response to widespread rape was fabricated, that economic and political motives were veiled behind allegations of rape, that most actual cases of lynching did not even involve a rape accusation, and that women and children were lynched as well as men. Commenting on one particularly gruesome case of genital torture in a way that illuminates the inextricability of lynching and sexuality, Marriott writes, "I suppose that this little bit of theatre serves to reveal, and support, a race hatred predicated on an identification between blackness and sexual guilt, an identification which generates the sadistic desire to witness the spectacle—the stench—of emasculated black men slowly bleeding to death" (9). The "identification between blackness and sexual guilt" of lynching—an *a priori* nonnormativity—renders blackness categorically vulnerable to violence, particularly to sexual violence wielded by or on behalf of white women.

Categorical vulnerability to lynching as a form of sexualized and racialized modern power that distinguishes black from white political ontology is mirrored by a difference in sexual epistemology. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that in modernity, sexuality has a special relationship to epistemology: explanations for individual traits, inheritances and disorders are located in the scientific study of sexuality. A "general and diffuse causality" (65) is attributed to sexuality in the etiology of personality, disease, and degenerescence. Of the homosexual in particular, he writes, "Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away" (43). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of Western culture in *Epistemology of the Closet* elaborates on this insight by focusing on the "secret that always gives itself away"—in other words, the open secret of homosexuality that characterizes

the closet. She argues that not only is sexuality a privileged axis of knowledge about the individual, but that an "endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition" structures and fractures "many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture" (1).

However, Siobhan Somerville complicates this monolithic explanation in *Queering the Color Line* by noting that the sexual science upon which Foucault bases his argument often overlapped with and borrowed terms from the contemporary science of race, which was established in order to maintain the antagonism between black and white in the political economy following the legal end of slavery. Since blackness and slavery were no longer formally interchangeable[18], racial scientists endeavored to prove that black bodies were not fundamentally human. Somerville writes, "I show that it was not merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as either 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively constructing and policing the boundary between 'black' and 'white' bodies" (3). The scientific theories of recapitulation, comparative anatomy, eugenics, and perversion that were developed to justify Jim Crow segregation were also used to distinguish between white bodies with different sexualities. However, it would be a mistake to read this overlap as a source of analogy between race and sexuality or as a sign that they function similarly. Where a proliferation of possible sexualities provided reductive explanations for the individual traits of white people, race provided a singular, reductive explanation for the individual traits of black people. In other words, the scientific approach to white people assumed the capacity for sexual diversity on a spectrum from normative to deviant, while the scientific

[18] In describing antebellum blackness and slavery as interchangeable, I mean to emphasize the racialization of slavery without denying the existence of free black people in the period. Even the freed(wo)man was not a citizen and sovereign subject but rather a slave who owned her/himself, as demonstrated by the negotiations of runaway slaves such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, who for security had to buy themselves from their masters even after reaching the North.

approach to black people assumed an *a priori* nonnormativity in comparison to the white biological norm. In my interpretation, the forms of paranoid, closeted, confessional knowledge that Sedgwick associates with the closet are also characteristic of race, especially in the Jim Crow era, when the violence of lynching and fears of miscegenation, amalgamation, and passing dominated white racial epistemology.

I am inclined to extend Somerville's argument even beyond the conclusions that she draws. While she argues that the overlap in sexual and racial science, and the use of racial and sexual tropes to disguise or screen one another in African American literature, indicate the intersectional, mutually constitutive nature of race and sexuality, I propose that in this literature, the racial secret, whether described as double consciousness, passing, or lynch logic, is actually more paradigmatically characteristic of modern epistemology than the sexual secret. For example, I take issue with her argument that the secret of racial identity is a screen, analogy, or symbolic system for *truly* discussing the secret of sexual identity.[19] For example, of *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, she writes, "[I]nterracial heterosexual desire functions in the text as both an analogy to homosexual object choice and a screen through which it can be articulated" (112). Why read interracial sexual desire and passing as a screen for homosexuality, rather than vice versa? Where Somerville queers the color line, I focus on coloring in the lines of queerness. The boundaries and narratives of modern sexuality originate in the logic of race, and

[19] In the vein of reading race as a screen for sexuality, Somerville's argument follows Judith Butler in her chapter of *Bodies That Matter* on Larsen's *Passing*, despite Somerville's lucid critique of precisely that argument. Somerville writes, "Butler reveals an understanding of 'queer studies' as a field analogous to (and therefore separable from) the field of critical race theory. […] Such an analogy constitutes racialization and queering as separable, rather than part of the same mechanism. Further, Butler privileges the 'differential formation of homosexuality across racial boundaries' as central to the analysis of 'queering.' Yet it may be the case that emphasizing the formation of homosexualities cannot adequately address the ways in which racialized identities and sexualities might be understood through the lens of 'queer'" (138-39).

blackness as a structure of violence, race, and sexuality is the constitutive outside to the proliferation of sexualities available to white civil society.

The overlap in the modern epistemologies of race and sexuality can be particularly seen in the motif of the veil throughout black American literature. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois formulates the classic definition of African American double consciousness in the metaphor of the veil. While blacks partially share the "soul-life" of the nation (indeed, are "woven into its warp and woof" (189)), that soul-life is "overshadowed and dwarfed by the (to them) all important question of their civil, political, and economic status. They must perpetually discuss the 'Negro Problem,'—must live, move, and have their being in it, and interpret all else in its light or darkness" (145-46). While to Du Bois this double consciousness is primarily paralyzing—double consciousness creates "a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence" (146)—its relationship to a form of privileged, exclusive knowledge is already apparent: "Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism" (146). Thus, double consciousness, caused by seeing oneself through two contradictory lenses, also has two contradictory effects—it creates both paralysis/morbidity *and* revolt and radicalism; it precludes the black from participating fully in the soul-life of the nation, but also allows her to withhold vital knowledge from the white. To describe Du Bois's theory, I prefer the phrase "epistemology of the veil" to the more standard "double consciousness," the latter of which I feel lends itself too easily to overgeneralization and analogy, while the former more readily retains its double sense of paralysis/morbidity and revolt/radicalism—the veil creates both exclusion and secrecy. Du

Bois's definition of the veil arises from an analysis of the antagonism between black and white as structural positions in American political ontology.

The veil characterizes all those who must see themselves simultaneously as "both a Negro and as an American" (9), and appears frequently throughout black American literature. But, most relevantly to our discussion of sexuality and the open secret, the veil goes on to have a very particular life in the literature of passing. In texts such as James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man,* Nella Larsen's *Passing*, and Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Plum Bun*, the veil becomes a valuable motif for the way it figures disguise, partial knowledge, and the privileged ability of a black person to recognize a passing member of the race. The narrators of these fictions of passing then generalize from the paranoid, knowing, confessional epistemology of the passing person to the way that the entire black race disguises knowledge from whites. In these ways, the epistemology of the veil very much overlaps the epistemology of the closet, challenging the claim that Foucault and Sedgwick make for the primacy of sexuality in the construction of modern epistemology. According to Foucault and Sedgwick, the epistemology of the closet is characterized by confession, paranoia, partial knowledge, and the open secret. These features also define the epistemology of the veil. Given the upheavals in racial science caused by the formal end of slavery, I suggest that race plays a role at least equal to that of sexuality in structuring the "endemic crisis" in Western forms of knowledge.

The epistemology of the veil, as described by Du Bois and developed by the authors of passing fictions, has a specific relationship to the immediate topic of this chapter, lynch sexuality. Goldsby titularly defines lynching as a "spectacular secret" of American history—spectacular, mass consumed and circulated, exemplary on one hand; disavowed, underreported, dismissed on the other. Goldsby herself briefly acknowledges in a footnote the relation between

"modernism's closeted relation to racial violence" and "queer theory's notion of the 'open secret'" (317). To elaborate on this connection is to reveal the foundational role of lynching in generating modern epistemology. Lynching and passing are intimately connected, as the desire to be protected from gratuitous violence was one factor in motivating passing. Johnson's Ex-Coloured Man, for example, famously decides to begin permanently passing after witnessing a lynching and feeling "[s]hame that I belonged to a race that could be so dealt with" (187); "[s]hame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals" (191). And just as the practice of passing creates paranoia about secrets written on the body and a confessional mode of writing, lynching creates a sexual paranoia—a feeling of danger in the presence of white women; a fear that the wrong word, action, or facial expression could result in violence.

Having laid out the nature of what I call lynch sexuality—a categorical vulnerability to anti-black gratuitous violence, premised on the *a priori* nonnormativity of interracial sexuality, that undergirds American political economy—I turn to how lynch sexuality continues to structure libidinal and political economies in post-World War II literature, after what we commonly consider the end of the era of lynching. Lynching is commonly considered to have dramatically declined in the 1930s and 40s, virtually disappearing by the 50s, but Goldsby challenges this accepted periodization. In her final chapter, she questions whether lynching statistics are accurate, given scholars' myopic focus on the South (288); points out spectacular cases from the 50s such as the murder of Emmett Till (294); and concludes:

> Lynching did not disappear. […] What distinguished lynching's contagion in the twentieth century, compared to the late-nineteenth-century discourse concerning its

> spread, was this broader ubiquity. With more than one way to deny African Americans their rights as citizens, there was less reason for whites in the North or South to resort to lynching as a means to dominate black people. […] But since the thoroughgoing disenfranchisement of African Americans did not "look" like lynching murders, the kinds of social deaths black people endured could be disavowed in the name of modernity once again. (289)

She turns the screw further by arguing that the very "disappearance thesis" itself has the effect of disavowing the violence of lynching and its persistence throughout the twentieth century, authorizing continued disenfranchisement (292). And she suggests that twentieth century literature is a site for the contestation of this disappearance: "Both the production and acuity of literary depictions of the violence rose sharply when the empirical evidence indicates actual lynching murders were in decline. Why the outburst of literary inventiveness in the wake of the violence's waning?" (289). To her analysis of the way twentieth century literature registers the ongoing role of lynching violence in political economy, I add the role of lynch sexuality in libidinal economy and its ongoing allegorization in contemporary literature.

The threat of white female sexuality to the black male at the "end" of the era of lynching is thematized in Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. The association of violence and interracial sexuality most dramatically spectacularized through lynching continues to construct representations of black male sexuality in later works such as James Baldwin's *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, as we have seen, and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, as we shall explore further. In these texts, the political ontology of blackness is defined by a dual prohibition against killing white men and having sex with white women. Behind this prohibition, which cannot help but place black men in a nonnormative orientation toward interracial sexuality, no

matter their actions or intentions, the threat of lynching constantly looms, creating a racial paranoia and what Frantz Fanon calls a shattering of the corporeal schema. As Goldsby argues, black authors dispute the "disappearance thesis" of lynching and expose it for the open secret of American history that it is.

In *Against the Closet*, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman argues that in mid-twentieth century black literature, depictions of interracial sexual desire explore the possibilities of freedom and equality. She writes:

> Representations of cross-racial *sexual* desire provide a space for black writers to investigate—and to interrogate—broader possibilities for meaningful civic cooperation and political equality between the races. These novels operate subtly according to the supposition that the level of personal and political freedom that African Americans have achieved or may exercise since emancipation may be indexed by the nation's collective response to the question: *would you let your son or daughter marry one?* (83-84).

I partially agree with her second proposition—that the freedom to express interracial desire without violent repercussion or social or legal constraint represents freedom writ large in this literature. I would add two caveats. First, that this is true for male writers and male protagonists much more than for female writers or female protagonists. Abdur-Rahman writes, "For black women, this [choice in cross-racial sexual matters] equates to freedom from sexual assault by white men and the right of legislative redress in cases of interracial rape. It grants black women, moreover, the option to participate voluntarily in interracial sexual liaisons and domestic partnerships" (84). However, she cites no examples from the literature itself, discussing only novels with male protagonists. (She discusses Baldwin's *Another Country*, which does include a relationship between the white man Vivaldo and the black woman Ida, but it's a relationship

doomed by Vivaldo's liberal, colorblind myopia—and also not mentioned in Abdur-Rahman's discussion.) In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the condition that no doubt underlies this omission: in contemporary black literature, it is almost impossible to find a depiction of interracial sexuality between a black female protagonist and a white man outside of novels set during slavery.

The second caveat is that, if it is true that black male writers use interracial sexuality as a yardstick of "the level of personal and political freedom that African Americans have achieved or may exercise since emancipation," then it must be acknowledged that they find that level low indeed. Abdur-Rahman acknowledges but downplays the significance of the fact "that literary depictions of interracial love and longing in midcentury black writing are haunted by both enacted and imagined violences against black men and women, as if to suggest that the swiftest and most predictable result of interracial contact in the United States is the continued subjection of African Americans" (84). Abdur-Rahman's language is hopeful, almost utopian, when she describes "broader possibilities for meaningful civic cooperation and political equality between the races" in the quotation above, and elsewhere when she writes, "In fact, a very important function of these representations is their contemplation of an ethos of love. […] Midcentury African American writers who depict cross-racial longing often take seriously the transformative power of interpersonal connectivity to foster ethical citizenship. These writers investigate the possibility of transforming the felt desire of sexual intrigue into a broader political vision and enactment of social and racial equality" (85). And yet, her own example of Ann Petry's *The Narrows* ends in the false accusation of rape and the lynching of the black man who pursues a relationship with the white woman. Why focus on the "ethos of love"—which requires a very wishful eye to detect even a trace of, in a novel like *If He Hollers Let Him Go*—at the expense of

analyzing the ongoing violence built into the political structure of interracial sexuality? In the continuity between Himes's 1945 novel and Baraka's 1964 play, we can see the persistence of lynch sexuality—a yardstick that clearly shows freedom and equality continuing to come up short.

A prohibition such as the one against interracial sexuality cannot help but automatically generate the desire for its own transgression. No matter one's sexual preferences or acts, a sexual prohibition becomes a fact of the geography of sexual normativity, towards which each individual must negotiate an orientation. Although I speak in psychoanalytic terms of prohibition and transgression here, I am also speaking materially and structurally. I take to heart Goldsby's caution against explaining lynching merely "as the murderous fulfillment of Freudian sexual pathologies" (20-21); such an approach naturalizes, individualizes, and dismisses as "perverse" what is paradigmatically a constructed, structural, and inexorably logical form of antiblack violence. As Fanon explains, "Freud insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis. […] It will be seen that the black man's alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny" (11). Jared Sexton explains the structural logic, or sociogeny, of the miscegenation taboo and its transgression by arguing in *Amalgamation Schemes* that

> white supremacy and antiblackness are fundamentally relational processes unfolding between antimiscegenation and its necessary failure. White supremacy and antiblackness, in other words, emerge in the interplay between miscegenation and the forms of resistance to it. An important claim follows from this reasoning: rather than establishing themselves in vulgar opposition to miscegenation, *white supremacy and antiblackness produce miscegenation* as a precious renewable resource, a necessary threat against

> which they are constructed, a loyal opposition, a double exposure. They rely upon miscegenation to reproduce their social relations; their relations are, in fact, this very reproduction. (25)

The prohibition against miscegenation, which purports to separate and police the boundaries between already discrete races, and its necessary transgression actually instantiate the very categories of race themselves at every level of abstraction. The texts examined in this chapter demonstrate that the internalization of this prohibition in the black male psyche creates a simultaneous hyperawareness and shattering of the corporeal schema, described by Fanon as the black man's negrophobic reaction to himself caused by interracial encounters. They also demonstrate the role of miscegenation in incurring the violence of lynching that structures the relationship between black and non-black political ontology. They demonstrate that even if a physical lynching never materializes, the imputation of lust for white women and the threat of retaliatory violence from white men are always present elements in the structures of libidinal *and* political economy.

Chester Himes's novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* shows the psychological turmoil roiling under the surface of a series of non-events that fail to transpire in the life of a black male shipyard worker in World War II Los Angeles. Himes's narrator, Bob Jones, contemplates killing a white man who calls him "nigger," but loses his nerve at the last minute; goes to the apartment of a white woman who has been sexually taunting and threatening him with the intention of raping her, but loses his desire to do so at the last minute; and finally flees after a false accusation of rape, fails to escape from the police, and fails to be lynched or imprisoned. The novel's two main plot arcs of killing a white man and raping a white woman intersect with a third, the protagonist's attempt to escape the category of blackness defined by those actions. This

series of frustrated plot lines and Himes's heavy use of foreshadowing, parallelism, and anticlimax allow us to examine a system of power that invades the black libidinal economy and renders both action and inaction equally nonnormative and punishable.

The connection between Himes's fiction and Fanon's theories in *Black Skin, White Masks* has been repeatedly remarked by critics (Simpson, Breu, and Melamed for example); in fact, Fanon himself is the first to remark on it. Fanon comments on Himes's novel in the context of the negrophobic encounter between the black man and the white woman in ways that illuminate the function of the miscegenation taboo in evacuating the black psyche, replacing the black imago with a negrophobic one, and shattering the black corporeal schema. Reading Jean-Paul Sartre's play *The Respectful Prostitute*, Fanon experiences: "A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of nonexistence. Sin is Negro as virtue is white. All those white men in a group, guns in their hands, cannot be wrong. I am guilty. I do not know of what, but I know that I am no good" (139). Fanon diagnoses a categorical association between blackness and guilt, between whiteness and the possibility of virtue. One can only be "inferior" if one is measured by the same standard; the categorical assumption of guilt, enforced by the violence suggested by the "guns in their hands," results in a feeling of "nonexistence" rather than "inferiority." Fanon shifts his text from Sartre's play to Richard Wright's *Native Son* to continue his exploration of the internalization of a negrophobic imago: "It is Bigger Thomas—he is afraid, he is terribly afraid. He is afraid, but of what is he afraid? Of himself. No one knows yet who he is, but he knows that fear will fill the world when the world finds out. And when the world knows, the world always expects something of the Negro. He is afraid lest the world know, he is afraid of the fear that the world would feel if the world knew" (139). According to Fanon, Bigger fears the violence of the world only secondarily; the imposition of the negrophobic imago has already intervened to make him

fear "himself" first and foremost. He is trapped in a phobic feedback loop, fearing the world's fear of him.

Somewhat strangely, Fanon then compares Bob Jones to the protagonist of *Native Son*: "In the end, Bigger Thomas acts. To put an end to his tension, he acts, he responds to the world's anticipation. So it is with the character in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*—who does precisely what he did not want to do. That big blonde who was always in his way, weak, sensual, offered, open, fearing (desiring) rape, became his mistress in the end" (140-41). Certainly, Bob and Bigger are united by their racial paranoia, their phobic feeling of *a priori* guilt, their vulnerability to the lynch mob, their ultimate doom in the judicial system, and their inhabitation of the genre of the protest novel. But does it matter that Bigger *does* kill Mary, and rape and murder Bessie, while Bob only contemplates rape and murder? Fanon later reiterates, "In the end, she and the Negro go to bed together" (156), indicating that the sexually euphemistic sense of the word "mistress" is intended. Fanon's misrepresentation (or misremembrance) of the novel—Madge does *not* become Bob's mistress in the sexual sense, consensually or non-consensually—seems to indicate that fantasizing about raping her is the same as completing the act. Or, that by fantasizing about raping her, Bob invokes the same violent lynch mob that a physical violation would have, thereby generating an occasion for the violence that structures black positionality. Or, that simply by implanting the fantasy and desire of miscegenous rape, causing the black man to see the rapist in his own imago, the white woman becomes the "mistress" of the black man, with all the power and violence the word implies. Fanon's equivocation between "weak" and "sensual," between "fearing" and "desiring," shows how easily a phobia becomes a philia, and how the existence of the prohibition against miscegenation polarizes sexual desire so that *any* orientation toward interracial sexuality is nonnormative *a priori*. Bigger Thomas's acts of rape and murder

and Bob Jones's fantasies of rape and murder are not deviant infractions against the normative sexuality of civil society; rather, they are precisely "the world's anticipation," and the world lacks a norm of interracial sex to which it is possible for the black man to even aspire to conform.

Lynch sexuality and racial paranoia structure Bob's conscious and unconscious perception. He establishes this in the novel's first pages, as he wakes from dreams about white police officers tricking black murder suspects into revealing whether or not they are crippled and about applying for a job and being laughed at by the white bosses for not having his tools (1-2). As his alarm clock returns him to consciousness of the world, he returns also to a consciousness of race, as he expresses in what Christopher Breu quite rightly calls "the passionate, affect-laden narration of Bob Jones" (771):

> I kept my eyes shut tight. But I began feeling scared in spite of hiding from the day. It came along with consciousness. It came into my head first, somewhere back of my closed eyes, moved slowly underneath my skull to the base of my brain, cold and hollow. It seeped down my spine, into my arms, spread through my groin with an almost sexual torture, settled in my stomach like butterfly wings. For a moment I felt torn all loose inside, shriveled, paralysed, as if after a while I'd have to get up and die. (2)

It is not until later in his description of his fear that he explicitly links it to race, but even in this initial appearance, it is racialized by the way it spreads through his "groin with an almost sexual torture," alluding to lynching. This paragraph ends in a paradox, linking the passive states of paralysis and death to the activity of getting up: how can one "paralysed" get up? Why would one get up only to die? This paradox introduces the novel's damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don't epistemology. Bob continues, "All that tight, crazy feeling of race as thick in the street as

gas fumes. Every time I stepped outside I saw a challenge I had to accept or ignore. Every day I had to make one decision a thousand times: *Is it now? Is now the time?* […] I could always feel race trouble, serious trouble, never more than two feet off" (4). The "decision" is vague; is what now, and is now the time for what? What exactly would it mean to accept the challenge? Its vagueness contributes to its ubiquity in Bob's consciousness and foreshadows the more specific decisions that structure the plot of the novel: whether to kill a white man or rape a white woman. But the decision whether or not to accept the challenge of race trouble is another double bind, akin to getting up to die: if he accepts, the consequences will almost certainly be violent, but if he does not accept, the decision does not stay made, but rather remains to be made a thousand times every day, and in the meantime destroys his confidence and corporeal schema.

Like Fanon's description of Bigger, Bob responds to the fear of the world, anticipating it even before it materializes on the face of Madge, a white female worker at the shipyard where he works. His paranoia is evident from his description of the state of race and gender relations at the shipyard, where he reports that he has declined every opportunity that white women have given him to make a sexual advance: "[A]t first because the coloured workers seemed as intent on protecting the white women from the coloured men as the white men were, probably because they wanted to prove to the white folks they could work with white women without trying to make them; and then, after I'd become a leaderman, because I, like a damn fool, felt a certain responsibility about setting an example" (18). Fear of the miscegenation taboo is implicit in this proving and example-setting. Bob's self-incrimination as a "damn fool" for wanting to set an example foreshadows the failure of the bid for bourgeois respectability he makes later in the novel. But would he be any less of a "damn fool" if he ignored the taboo and took the

opportunity to make an advance? His interactions with Madge suggest that he is guilty either way.

She telegraphs the message of his categorical guilt by her "performance" in their first interactions. They run into each other in the bowels of the ship under construction, and after an ungenerous blason in which he emphasizes her over-application of makeup and her appearance of hyper-sexuality, Bob says, "We stood there for an instant, our eyes locked, before either of us moved; then she deliberately put on a frightened, wide-eyed look and backed away from me as if she was scared stiff, as if she was a naked virgin and I was King Kong" (19). The momentary delay in her reaction of fear indicates to Bob that it is a purposeful performance. In the instant in which their eyes lock, in which Bob waits, knowing that Madge will "put on that scared-to-death act" (19), he resembles Fanon in the movie theater: "I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theater are watching me, examining me, waiting for me" (140). Like the pre-scripted, inevitable movie in which Fanon waits to see himself, Madge's performance forces Bob to see himself as a phobogenic object. In this he resembles Fanon in his famous encounter with the white boy on the train, who finds,

> Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. […] I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin." (112)

Surely King Kong menacing the naked virgin belongs to this litany of images that crumble the corporeal schema and replace it with a racial epidermal one. Continuing his affect-laden narration, Bob describes a series of reactions to his encounter with Madge, beginning with "blinding fury" that makes his "face burn white-hot," proceeding to "lust" that shakes him "like an electric shock," ending with sickness and nausea (19). Despite their differences, these sensations affect his body very similarly. The fury goes "through his brain" and sends blood "rush[ing] to [his] head like gales of rain"; he describes the lust, "it came up in my mouth, filling it with tongue, and drained my whole stomach down into my groin"; and finally, "I went sick to the stomach" (19). Emotions and affects rush, seep, spread, and drain through his body; the lust in his groin reminds us of the fear that settles in his groin earlier. Again, we experience the subtle sense that the content of Bob's reactions does not ultimately matter, his fury, lust, nausea, and fear proceeding through the same embodied processes without affecting the world around him.

Bob encounters Madge again later the same day, asking her to help his crew complete a job, and this time he accepts more of what he calls the challenge of race. The scene begins as a reenactment of the first encounter: "I knew the instant I recognized her that she was going to perform then—we were both going to perform" (27). But, with the motivation of accomplishing his defense-industry laborer's task, he attempts to disrupt the scene. When she again begins to dramatize her fear of him, he says, "I started off giving her a sneer so she'd know I knew it was phoney" (27). He forces her to drop the "phoney act," but to no avail, since the racial script is still available to her: "I ain't gonna work with no nigger!" (27). He responds by calling her a "cracker bitch," using racial and gendered epithets as if they can combine to create an equal and opposite response to her deployment of the word "nigger." But the falsity of the equivalence between "nigger" and "cracker bitch" becomes obvious in several ways: she calls upon nearby

white men to defend her, saying, "You gonna let a nigger talk tuh me like that?" (27); this causes him to leave without accomplishing the goal of getting her to perform the work he needs; and, most painfully, he is demoted from leaderman to mechanic, losing the draft deferment protection that came with his more senior position. When his boss calls him in to demote him, Bob objects, "She called me a nigger" (28), but all he gets is a lecture about respect, courtesy, and responsibility, and a veiled threat of lynching: "I don't have to tell you what could have happened by your cursing a white woman, you know as well as I do. […] Don't you?" (29). By attempting to disrupt the script, Bob only ends up more vulnerable. The threat of lynching underlies the exposure to the draft that he now faces, and the words "cracker bitch" are no defense against the category of blackness.

The racial paranoia that automatically pertains between a white woman and a black man is not limited to the interactions between Bob and Madge. Sitting in a bar in Little Tokyo, which he notes has had a black clientele since the Japanese American population has been interned, he witnesses the structures of fear, lust, and tension provoked by the entry of "[t]wo white soldiers and a white chick" (74). "Every eye in the room was on them" (74); the waitress serves them only reluctantly; the female patrons sneer and mutter; but the black men stare at and flirt with the woman while the white men "protect her" (75). The men attempt to leave without the woman, but the bartender, foreseeing trouble if the white woman remains in the bar without her escort, insists, "She came in with you, she's got to go out with you" (76). And Bob reflects, "All she's got to do now, I thought, is start performing. She could get everybody in the joint into trouble, even me just sitting there buying a drink. […] She could take those two black chumps flirting with her outside and get them thirty years apiece in San Quentin; in Alabama she could get them hung. A little tramp—but she was white" (76). The threat of lynching is inherent in the structural

positions of white female and black male, regardless of the features of the individuals, whether that means being a "little tramp" or being a shipyard worker or college graduate. Bob fantasizes about the race riot in Little Tokyo that could result if the confrontation between the bartender and the white men turns violent: "I wanted it to come and get it over with. But the white boy caught himself and didn't say anything; I felt a sense of disappointment" (77). Just as Bob feels that he personally must make the decision to accept or ignore the challenge of race a thousand times a day, he sees the potential for mass conflict inherent in every sexualized racial interaction.

But lynch sexuality not only threatens the lives of the innocent; perversely, Bob Jones tells us, it can instill the very desire to rape and murder that it purports to police. The desire to be free from the violence of lynch sexuality can cause what Fanon calls "hallucinatory whitening" (100). Fanon theorizes that the attraction of black men to white women is due to this desire to escape their own negrophobic self image: "Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly *white*. I wish to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*. Now […] who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man" (63). In other words, lynch sexuality at once generates the desire not to be black and equates whiteness with sexual access to white women, thereby creating more opportunities for the miscegenation taboo to be violated and violently enforced—or, as Sexton puts it in the analysis quoted earlier, miscegenation is "a precious renewable resource."

Bob feels the effects of the simultaneous imposition and punishment of the desire for miscegenation in his next encounters with Madge. He works up the courage to confront her again, only to be intercepted by her white male co-workers, one of whom he describes as "studying me with that sharp speculating curiosity of white men watching Negroes' reactions to

white women" (117). As opposed to the bystanders who earlier "protect" Madge, this one offers her to him as a sort of consolation for being demoted. He says, "What she needs is a good going over by someone" and Bob adds, "I knew he wanted to say by some coloured fellow but just couldn't bring himself to say it" (118). Where the white man's attempt to impose interracial desire on Bob ends in wordlessness, Bob supplies the meaning himself. Bob attempts to refuse the white man's offer, saying, "She knows goddamned well nobody wants to rape her" (118), but the man responds as if he has said precisely the opposite. He offers Bob her address and says, "Maybe you can cure her" (119). It becomes Bob's turn to be speechless: "'Look, man…' I began, then didn't know what to say" (119). Bob realizes he is caught in a situation of *a priori* guilt:

> "Say, man, look," I began again. I wanted to tell him I didn't want to go to bed with her, I wanted to black her eyes; but just the idea of her being a white woman stopped me. I felt flustered, caught, guilty. I couldn't realize what was happening to me, myself. It was funny in a way. I couldn't tell him I *didn't* want her because she was a white woman and he was a white man, and something somewhere way back in my mind said that would be an insult. And I couldn't tell him that I *did* want her, because the same thing said that would be an insult too. (119)

Whether he desires her and acts on it, desires her and doesn't act on it, doesn't desire her and says he doesn't, or doesn't desire her and doesn't say so, he is categorically caught and guilty simply by proximity to a white woman. He proposes wanting to black her eyes as an opposite to wanting to go to bed with her, when in fact having any intention toward her at all tangles him in the traps of lynch sexuality. Indeed, he attempts to act on the white man's suggestion and make a pass at her: "But when I got to her I lost my nerve. I couldn't say a word. I just couldn't do it,

that was all. She was pure white Texas. And I was black. And a white man was standing there. I never knew before how good a job the white folks had done on me" (124). Again, Bob reduces the situation to structural differences between "pure white" and "black." His speechlessness in the face of pure white Texas reveals to him the saturation of his own mind with negrophobia. Just as Bob's ambivalence over desiring her or not does not make a difference in his categorical guilt, Madge can be ambivalent about whether she desires or fears Bob, and it does not make a difference in the categorical power she wields:

> So it wasn't that Madge was white; it was the way she used it. She had a sign up in front of her as big as Civic Centre—KEEP AWAY, NIGGERS, I'M WHITE! And without having to say one word she could keep all the white men in the world feeling they had to protect her from black rapists. That made her doubly dangerous because she thought about Negro men. I could tell that the first time I saw her. She wanted them to run after her. She expected it, demanded it as her due. I could imagine her teasing them with her body, showing her bare thighs and breasts. Then having them lynched for looking. (124)

Her hyper-consciousness of the "danger" black men pose to her renders her ironically "doubly dangerous" to them, as it makes her more likely to engage in a sexual interaction with them, and such an interaction is paradigmatically dangerous regardless of the intentions or desires of the parties involved.

Despite his awareness of this double danger, Bob cannot escape the imposition of desire. As Fanon writes, he "does precisely what he did not want to do" (140). His own behavior comes as a surprise to him: "All of a sudden I knew that I was getting ready to go back and see Madge" (142). He shows up at her room in a residential hotel and knocks on the door; her power of ambivalence is evident in her reactions. She first threatens, "If you don't get away from there I'll

call the police and have you put underneath the jail," and "I'll scream" (144), but when he persists, she opens the door, lets him in, and starts getting dressed to go out with him. He tackles her with the intent to rape her, but loses his desire once he pins her. His loss of interest provokes just the reaction he anticipates when he fantasizes earlier, "I could imagine her teasing them with her body, showing her bare thighs and breasts. Then having them lynched for looking" (124). She strips, showing off her naked body, and says, "Ain't I beautiful? […] Pure white. […] This'll get you lynched in Texas" (147). She runs across the room, teasing, "You can't have none unless you catch me" (147). When he refuses to chase her or take his own clothes off as she orders, she implicitly threatens to scream again: "You know what I'll do" (147). Lynch sexuality is a categorical vulnerability that can be used to coerce Bob *into* sexual acts as soon as out of them. He begins to desire her again and pins her to the floor, where she says, "All right, rape me then, nigger!" (147). But again the implications of her paradoxical invitation to rape stop him cold: "*Rape*—just the sound of the word scared me, took everything out of me, my desire, my determination, my whole build-up. I was taut, poised, ready to light out and run a crooked mile. The only thing she had to do to make me stop was just say the word" (148). When Madge encourages Bob to rape her, categories of individual consent and coercion, desire and repulsion lose meaning, overridden by structural relations. This is why Fanon describes Madge interchangeably as "fearing" and "desiring," "weak" and "offered." In general, but in this scene in particular, it is important not to read Madge's ambivalence as a true representation of an individual white woman; rather, she is an allegory of the structural position and powers of white womanhood and of the double jeopardies of lynch sexuality.

The novel's climax confirms the vision of lynch sexuality established throughout. Indeed, Himes's ample use of foreshadowing is an apt device, as it emphasizes the foregone conclusion

of Bob's lack of control over his fate. Madge finally decisively exercises the power of her structural position when Bob accidentally stumbles upon her napping in a bunkroom of the ship. He claims himself to be cured of desire for her—"I'd gotten Madge completely of out my thoughts"; "I didn't want to see her now; I'd gotten over it" (178)—but mere proximity is enough to entrap him in lynch sexuality. He realizes the danger he is in, saying, "I didn't want to be caught in the dark with her" and "I didn't want to be found there with her under any circumstances" (178), but she closes and locks the door and tries to seduce him. He describes,

> I began inching back toward the door, scared any moment she might start to perform. It was funny the way I was trying to slip away from her without starting any ruckus; but it wasn't funny then. I was tense, nervous; I was really scared of that dame. […] I knew I should have run, got the hell away from that crazy bitch no matter who was out in the companionway. But I couldn't; all I could do was just stare at her. All she had was her colour, so help me, but it put me right back on that weak-kneed edge. (179)

If his behavior "was funny" but "wasn't funny then," when and to whom is it funny? Bob positions himself as an objective observer, just as Fanon "submitted [him]self to an objective observation." "Objective," in this sense, indicates not impartiality but rather the invasion of the black psyche by the white imago. There is also deep irony in his attempt to "slip away." He wants to leave the bunkroom to avoid being found there with Madge, but it is the sound of voices in the companionway that *stop* him from leaving: "Footsteps sounded in the companionway. I had the door unlocked, but I locked it again, snatched my hand away as if it were hot" (179). The very same *a priori* assumption of guilt that makes him desperate to get out of the bunkroom prevents him from doing so. He re-locks the door Madge has already locked, locking himself in with her to avoid detection by the people in the companionway, but it is precisely the fact that

the door is locked that raises their suspicion and causes them to get a blow torch to open it. When he touches the lock again, he pulls his hand away because it is literally hot from the burner, just as his simile foreshadows.

Unlike Bob, who is doomed by lynch sexuality whether the contact he has with Madge in the bunkroom is consensual or not, or even if no contact occurs, Madge has virtue to lose and a way to defend it. At first, she too is frightened of being discovered: "My eyes sought Madge's, warning. Hers were panicky, trapped" (179). But she resolves to accuse him of rape, screaming, *"Help! Help! My God, help me! Some white man, help me! I'm being raped!"* (180). As soon as she does this, she loses her fear: "She lay there without moving and looked up at me. But there was no fear in her face" (181), and she coldly says, "I'm gonna get you lynched, you nigger bastard" (181). Meanwhile, Bob experiences sheer terror, accompanied by what Fanon calls the disintegration of the corporeal schema; the types of uncontrollable affects he has described moving through his body throughout the novel are intensified to the extreme: "I was in the middle of a breath and the air got rock-hard in my lungs, like frozen steam, and wouldn't budge. My whole body got rigid and my head swelled as if it would explode. My eyes felt as if they were five times their natural size; as if they were bursting in their sockets, popping out of my head. Then cold numbing terror swept over me in a paralysing wave" (180). Things that should be able to move—his breath in his lungs; his body—are paralyzed, and things that should be static—the size of his head and eyes—explode.

Bob is violently apprehended by his white fellow workers in a manner I will discuss below; he is taken to the hospital. Lynn Itagaki has quite rightly analyzed how the injuries Bob sustains are racialized (75). His mouth feels "cottony" (183); he wears a "turban of bandages" (183); his lips are "swollen several times their natural size" (183-84); his front teeth are knocked

out; and most importantly, he describes, "I hurt in the groin as if I was ruptured" (184). The fear that settles in his groin at the opening of the novel foreshadows this physical pain in the groin, which in turn alludes to the genital torture of lynching. He reflects, "Well, she had got me lynched all right. But something was missing. Something important. Then suddenly I knew what it was. I hadn't even tried to rape her; I'd been trying to get away from her. […] She'd kept me there, cornered me, hadn't let me go. I'd wanted to go, but she hadn't let me. She couldn't get away with that. This wasn't Georgia" (184). He fantasizes about telling the president of the shipyard and getting his medical bills paid by the company; he fantasizes about getting Madge fired. He even fantasizes about mercifully declining to sue the workers who beat him up. But the reality is spoken by the guard in the hospital room when Bob tries to tell him he is innocent: "There ain't anybody to tell" (184). When he finds out he is being arrested, the reality sinks in: "Then it smacked me, shook me to the core. I don't know what set it off; it must have been deep inside of me—always inside of me. I knew in one great flash she really could send me to the pen for thirty years. My word against hers, and all the evidence on her side. I knew there was no way in the world I could prove I hadn't tried to rape her" (187). The knowledge of his categorical guilt comes from "deep inside" himself and yet shakes him to the core. "In one great flash," he realizes the falsity of the distinctions between Georgia and Los Angeles and between the lynch mob and the court system: "But now I was scared in a different way. Not of the violence. Not of the mob. Not of physical hurt. But of America, of American justice. The jury and the judge. The people themselves. Of the inexorability of one conclusion—that I was guilty. […] The whole structure of American thought was against me; American tradition had convicted me a hundred years before" (187). He realizes that lynching is not an extralegal act from which he is protected

by the "jury and the judge," but rather a structure of political economy built into and working together with that very system.

He escapes from the hospital, but is apprehended again, this time by the police. In the last of a long series of anticlimaxes and ironic reversals, he is neither lynched nor imprisoned for thirty years as he fears. The president of the shipyard, to whom he has fantasized about pleading his innocence, announces that Madge has "consented to withdraw her charge" (201) to avoid creating racial tension. But Bob instantly perceives that this is a punishment disguised as a mercy; he deduces that the judge and president have interrogated Madge and discovered the falsity of her accusation, but will punish him anyway to cover for her. Far from heroically pleading his innocence, he thinks, "But I didn't care how he played it—I was beat" (201). The president lectures him, "I genuinely regret that circumstances permit you to escape punishment[. …] Yours was a crime of uncontrolled lust—the act of an animal" (202), and the judge gives him "a break" (203) by "letting" him join the armed forces, with the extra illusion of choice: "any branch you want" (203). Since the beginning of the novel when he loses his draft deferment, joining the armed services has been one of his biggest fears. He considers it a form of self-betrayal to fight fascism abroad while Jim Crow prevails at home. His coworker Ben says, and he agrees, "As long as the Army is Jim Crowed a Negro who fights in it is fighting against himself" (121). Fighting against himself is precisely what Bob has done the entire novel—he fights against the paralysis of the veil and against the affects that destroy his corporeal schema; now he is forced to continue the fight. His fellow enlistees notice this when one says, "Let's go, man, the war's waiting," and another responds, "Looks like this man has had a war" (203). Whether he tries to have sex with Madge or avoid her, whether she consents or not, he is continuously in a war with himself caused by the pressures of lynch sexuality.

Just as having sex with a white woman might seem like proof of freedom from the constraints of lynch sexuality but is actually part of the "precious renewable resource" machinery of miscegenation, killing a white man represents the desire to be free from being the object of violence oneself; this is the second major plot arc of the novel. Bob's reflection on his past indicates the link between anti-black economic violence, discrimination, and the desire to retaliate with violence: "Cleveland wasn't the land of the free or the home of the brave either. That was one reason why I left there to come to Los Angeles; I knew if I kept on getting refused while white boys were hired from the line behind me I'd hang somebody as sure as hell" (3). Later, he says, "I was going to lynch me a white boy" (60). His coworker Pigmeat echoes this word choice when he says, "When I escaped from Mississippi I swore I'd lynch the first sonabitch that called me a 'buddy'" (11). As another coworker explains, in the South, "what a peckerwood means when he calls you 'buddy'" is someone who "drinks bilge water, eats crap, and runs rabbits" (11). In Bob's thought and Pigmeat's statement, the fact that they use the terms "hang" and "lynch"—despite the fact that they would act as an individuals rather than mobs—emphasizes that they wish not just to inflict violence of their own, but specifically to reverse anti-black violence. Just as Fanon analyzes the feeling that sex with a white woman can turn one white, it is as if Bob and Pigmeat believe they can escape the category of blackness by performing lynchings. Just like the machinery of miscegenation, however, the attempt to reverse the violence only authorizes more violence. Bob is aware of this; at one point he thinks, "I had to get off the goddamned streets out of the goddamned peckerwoods' eyes before I killed some son of a bitch and went to the chair" (94). Lacking the sanction of structural positionality for his violence, Bob would go "to the chair" for the same action a lynch mob could commit with impunity.

Despite leaving Cleveland, he is followed by his desire to retaliate against racism by killing a white man. At work, he has an altercation over a dice game that ends with a white man named Johnny Stoddart saying, "I'll cool the nigger!" and punching him so hard he loses consciousness (33). Just as Madge's threat of lynching makes him desire to rape her, Stoddart's violence gives him the urge to murder:

> It was then I decided to murder him cold-bloodedly, without giving him a chance. […] I wanted to kill the son of a bitch and keep on living myself. I wanted to kill him so he'd know I was killing him and in such a way that he'd know he didn't have a chance. I wanted him to feel as scared and powerless and unprotected as I felt every goddamned morning I woke up. I wanted him to know how it felt to die without a chance; how it felt to look death in the face and know it was coming and know there wasn't anything he could do but sit there and take it like I had to take it from Kelly and Hank and Mac and the cracker bitch because nobody was going to help him or stop it or do anything about it at all. (36)

He wishes to place Stoddart in the same category of absolute vulnerability as himself, to force Stoddart to accept death as he accepts harassment and discrimination from his white bosses and coworkers. With the ambiguity of the pronoun "it," which refers to death when he desires that Stoddart "sit there and take it" but lacks a clear referent but when he continues, "like I had to take it from Kelly and Hank and Mac and the cracker bitch," he uses "take it" as a generic term for enduring an unpleasant experience and simultaneously equates the harassment he experiences at work with a kind of death. Just as he wants to occupy the structural position of whiteness by not simply murdering but specifically by "lynch[ing …] a white boy" (60), he wants Stoddart to be forced to occupy the structural position of blackness, "to feel as scared and powerless and

unprotected as I felt every goddamned morning I woke up," knowing nothing will be done to protect him or punish his killer.

Bob's interactions with Stoddart powerfully parallel his interactions with Madge. Indeed, parallelism joins foreshadowing as one of Himes's dominant devices. Just as a worker gives Bob Madge's address with the suggestion that he rape or have sex with her, another worker tells Bob where on the ship Stoddart works and gives him a knife to kill him with (34). He experiences similar rolling waves of affect: "I felt that sick, gone feeling again. I began trembling; I felt weak, scared" (34). Again, he feels nausea: "Bile rolled up in my stomach and spread out in my mouth" (35). But just as he sometimes gets an "edge" of lust that changes his feelings toward Madge, he loses the "sick, scared, gone feeling" (36) when he contemplates killing Stoddart. In its place is a feeling of inclusion, patriotism, and strength: "I was going to kill him if they hung me for it, I thought pleasantly. A white man, a supreme being. […] All the tightness that had been in my body, making my motions jerky, keeping my muscles taut, left me and I felt relaxed, confident, strong. I felt just like I thought a white boy oughta feel; I had never felt so strong in all my life" (38). Again, the thought of reversing the categories of black and white—making Stoddart categorically vulnerable; feeling himself "just like […] a white boy oughta feel"—leads to Fanon's "hallucinatory whitening."

Just as he goes to Madge's house but loses his desire before raping her, he never consummates his desire to kill Stoddart. He follows him from the shipyard to his house. When Stoddart sees him, he feels some of the fear that Bob wants him to feel: "His eyes stretched with stark incredulity and his face went stiff white, like wrinkled paper" (44). He hurries into the house, pushing the wife and children who run to meet him back into the space of domestic safety, slamming and bolting the door. Bob has a clear shot, but: "I stopped. I didn't have to kill

him now, I thought. I could kill him any time; I could save him up for killing like the white folks had been saving me up for all these years" (44). Given the constant threat of lynching, Bob sees himself not as living, but as being saved up for death, under a temporarily commuted death sentence. He tries again to reverse his and Stoddart's structural positions at the end of the novel, while he is attempting to escape, before being apprehended by the cops. Thinking bitterly about how he will go to prison "[f]or raping a white woman I hadn't even tried to rape," he has a sudden epiphany: "Then it burst wide open in my mind. I wasn't excited. I looked at it objectively, as if it concerned somebody else. I'd kill Johnny Stoddart and let them hang me for it. All they could ever do to me then would be to get even. I was going but I'd take him with me" (195). Already categorically guilty, he has a fantasy of committing an infraction to retroactively justify his sentence. He has a fantasy that he can "*let* them hang me for it," retaining a sense of agency even his own death. In other words, he tries to live under the rule of law of civil society. However, in another anticlimax, he is pulled over by the cops on his way to Stoddart's house and never realizes his fantasy. The resolution of this storyline is provided only in dream form. In his cell, he vividly dreams of going to Stoddart's house and shooting him. He dreams of the sense freedom and release he would feel—"as free, goddamnit, as Thomas Jefferson" (197). But his capacity to fantasize is limited by the intrusion of the white imago. He dreams that after killing Stoddart, he is apprehended by a white man—"The biggest man I ever saw in the uniform of a Marine sergeant with rows of stripes and decorations on his chest" (198)—who asks him why he killed him, and, when Bob responds, "He called me a nigger," who howls with laughter and comments, "That's right, you kill 'em every time. […] I always wondered 'bout you folks whether you ever wanted to kill us like we wanna kill you" (199). The parallel construction of his sentence, which equates the two desires to kill, is belied by the fact that the Marine goes on to

brag, “I’m from Florida and ev’ybody I knew said they’d killed a nigger or two” (199), before he punches Bob hard enough to kill—or, since he is dreaming, to wake him up. The contrast between the flippancy of the Marine’s attitude toward “kill[ing] a nigger” and the punishment or death that awaits Bob for killing a white man illustrates the asymmetry of their structural positions.

There is the third plot arc of the novel, a subplot that frequently intersects with the two dominant plots. Aside from fantasizing about participating in, rather than being vulnerable to, the behaviors of rape of murder, Bob tries at least one other tactic to escape the categorical violence of blackness: his identification as a worker. After waking up with the paralyzing sense of having to “get up and die,” he begins to feel more capable when he puts on his coveralls, iron-toed boots, work hat, and leather jacket: “Something about my working clothes made me feel rugged, bigger than the average citizen, stronger than a white-collar worker—stronger even than an executive. Important too. It put me on my muscle” (9). His blue-collar job is especially a source of pride because it is part of the war effort; as his girlfriend, Alice, euphemizes to explain why he is not yet an attorney, “He’s fighting on our production front now” (86). Seeing him in his work clothes, she compliments him, “You look like a worker in a CIO win-the-war poster” (164). But the strength and patriotism he gains from constructing a naval ship during wartime is undercut on many fronts. He experiences constant antiblackness on the job, including being pointedly ignored by his boss, given undesirable tasks such as installing the toilets, refused access to the blueprints he needs to instruct his crew, and expected to endure racist taunts without responding. When he attempts to appeal to the union steward for help fighting his demotion over his exchange with Madge, the steward attempts to brush him off; when he insists, the steward responds, “Jesus Christ, all you guys do is gripe[. …] You don’t want a union, you want a court of human

relations" (113). While the comment is intended hyperbolically and dismissively, it registers a grain of truth; unionism, premised on the conflict between workers and bosses, is not a sufficient platform for the reckoning that would satisfy the complaints of the black workers in the face of white supremacy. Bob and the steward dispute the union's history of helping or shutting out black workers. The steward starts to lecture him about patriotism and unity in the fight against fascism, to which Bob responds, "Get these crackers to unite with me. I'm willing. I'll work with 'em, fight with 'em, die with 'em, goddammit. But I ain't gonna even try to do any uniting without anybody to unite with. […] What the hell do I care about unity, or the war either, for that matter, as long as I'm kicked around by every white person who comes along? Let the white people get some goddamned unity" (115). Bob's tirade, in the phrases "Get these crackers to unite with me" and "Let the white people get some goddamned unity," captures how the invocation of "unity" underhandedly relies on the perpetuation of categories of racial difference. It also captures the lack of recognition between black and white in the phrase, "I ain't gonna even try to do any uniting without anybody to unite with." Later, reflecting on his loss of patriotism and disillusionment with the war effort, he says, "I knew the average patriotic American would have said a leaderman was justified in cursing out a white woman worker for refusing to do a job of work in a war industry in time of war—so long as the leaderman was white. Might have even called her a traitor and wanted her tried for sabotage" (152). As long as blackness and white supremacy form an irreconcilable antagonism, there is not "anybody" for Bob "to unite with" as a worker, and race overrides the unity called for by the war effort.

Moreover, his exclusion from the protection of the category "worker" has infiltrated his unconscious and is revealed symptomatically in dreams and metaphors. As mentioned earlier, the novel opens with Bob awakening from a dream about race and employment: "I was asking two

white men for a job. They looked as if they didn't want to give me the job but didn't want to say so outright. Instead they asked me if I had my tools. I said I didn't have any tools but I could do the job. They began laughing at me, scornfully and derisively. One said, 'He ain't got no tools,' and they laughed like hell" (2). Throughout the novel, Bob takes pleasure in exposing the racism veiled behind ostensibly colorblind actions. Here, he also exposes the link between sexuality and economy, with the inevitable connotation of castration in the taunt, "He ain't got no tools." But most revealingly, this image emerges from his *own* unconscious mind. In his own dream life, he is castrated, incapable of laboring, worthy of scorn and derision. In his discussion of Fanon's language of "the black man irrevocably and unforgettably at war with himself" (66), David Marriott asks, "[W]hat do you do with an unconscious which appears to hate you?" (90). Marriott expands this discussion through analysis of one of Fanon's cinematic sources, *Home of the Brave*, but he would have found abundant evidence in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, as well.

In addition to the dreams it invents, Bob's unconscious appears to hate him in its choice of metaphor. As Bob describes the physical, emotional, and affective symptoms of antiblackness, he continually, symptomatically uses as metaphorical vehicles the very industrial tools and processes which seem to promise him participation in the structural position of "worker." After an encounter with hostile white pedestrians, he says, "My arms were rubbery and my fingers numb; I was weak as if I'd been heaving sacks of cement all day in the sun" (13). When Stoddart punches him, "a blinding explosion went off just back of my eyes as if the nerve centres had been dynamited" (33). Waking up, he remembers his conflict with Madge and says, "[S]omething took a heavy hammer and nailed me to the bed" (101); later that day, when his workmates ask what is bothering him, he thinks, "I felt as fragile as overheated glass; one rough touch and I'd burst into a thousand pieces" (102). After his argument with the union steward, he

describes, “I felt something hammering on my brain, banging away with a ten-pound sledge” (116). When his conflict with Madge wavers between animosity and lust, the lust “built up fast and shook me like a chip hammer digging in my navel” (124); when he sees her in the canteen later that day, he approaches her, “my heart pumping like a rivet gun and my legs wobbly weak” (129). While reflecting on his limited options for participation in American society, he is “[l]ying there with the hangover beating in my head like John Henry driving steel” (152). Heaving sacks of cement, driving steel, blowing glass; dynamite, heavy hammers, ten-pound sledges, chip hammers, and rivet guns—to perform these activities and wield these tools is supposed to be his ticket into working class identity and unity with the white workers. But as the vehicles of his metaphors, they are all instruments of antiblackness, turned against him and causing physical and psychological suffering.

Finally, his metaphors are brought violently to life. The metaphorical vehicle of the hammer becomes literal when he is apprehended by a mob of white men for the false accusation of rape: “I looked up, saw a white guy wielding a sledge hammer, his face sculptured in unleashed fury” (181-82). He fights free of the mob and starts down a ladder, but:

> A guy leaned over the hole and swung at my head with a ball-peen hammer. I was going forward with my hands on the railings and saw the hammer coming. It didn’t look like a hard blow; it looked as though it floated toward me. I saw the guy’s face, not particularly malevolent, just disfigured, a white man hitting at a nigger running by. But I couldn’t do a thing; I couldn’t let go the railing to get my hands up; couldn’t even duck. I didn’t feel the blow; just the explosion starting at a point underneath my skull and filling my head with a great flaming roar. And then what seemed like falling a million miles through space and hitting something hard to splatter into pieces. (182)

From the moment Bob awakens feeling "paralysed, as if after a while I'd have to get up and die" (2), the plot has progressed inexorably toward this moment, and this moment contains the plot in miniature: Bob sees the hammer coming, but is powerless to stop or avoid it. There is a trace of his pride as an industrial worker in the precise vocabulary with which he identifies sledge and ball-peen hammers, but this identification is overridden by what he objectively, detachedly observes to be the structural positions of "a white man" and "a nigger running by." While he consciously identifies as a worker, the part of his mind that furnishes vehicles for his metaphors of suffering has relentlessly and prophetically warned him about his exclusion from this identity; the hammers that stand metaphorically for his suffering become literally the tools that complete his violent defeat by lynch sexuality.

I would be remiss to end this chapter without addressing the question: How much of the content of *If He Hollers Let Him Go* is due to its protest novel genre? Certainly, not all black men are as completely entrapped by lynch sexuality as Bob Jones. Even within the world of the novel, he is a particularly "sensitive" case. Himes's descriptions of his protagonist's fear, violence, and powerlessness to avoid a tragic fate clearly owe a debt to that archetypal protest novel, *Native Son*. Jodi Melamed makes a compelling argument for reading Himes's career as a progression that begins with the genre of the protest novel, as partially dictated by the conventions of "racial liberalism" which most directly influenced him through the Rosenwald Fund award that allowed him to write his early novels; proceeds through *End of a Primitive*, in which he rejects and satirizes the conventions of the protest novel "in order to make racial liberalism visible as a mode of racial regulation that ironically operates new forms of racialized violence and discipline through the very mechanisms of its antiracism" (772); and ends in the

absurdity of the Harlem detective novel series. Without disputing Melamed's excellent description, I would argue that Himes never alters his view of structural antagonism and lynch sexuality; he alters only the tones, genres, and orientations toward his audience that he believes will be effective in expressing it.

To give another, more circuitous answer to this question, I conclude with a brief consideration of literature of other genres that nonetheless argues that lynch sexuality is a deadly, ongoing structure of psychic, sexual, material, and political life. I have already discussed lynch sexuality in Baldwin's *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, above and in Chapter Two. Baldwin, of course, is the original spokesman for the rejection of the limitations of the protest novel, as famously stated in his essay "Everybody's Protest Novel." Nevertheless, he describes the feelings of entrapment, paranoia, and vulnerability associated with lynch sexuality.

In the play *Dutchman*, Amiri Baraka adds his Black Arts voice to the consensus. An archetypical encounter between a black man and a white woman on the train in New York takes much the same course as the encounter between Bob and Madge. The meeting of Clay and Lula automatically provokes in the audience a paranoid awareness of the taboo against miscegenation, making Clay categorically vulnerable through mere proximity. *Dutchman* portrays what Fanon describes as the anxiety of contact between the black man and the white woman. From the instant that Lula turns her gaze upon Clay and asks, "Weren't you staring at me through the window?" (6), we feel the lynch mob begin to form offstage. The very extent of the white woman's fear of rape—and the black man's fear of the white woman's fear—suggests the emotional power of phobic object, and therefore the ease with which a phobia becomes a philia, and vice versa. Of negrophobia, Fanon writes, "Since we have learned to know all the tricks the ego uses in order to defend itself, we know too that its denials must in no case be taken literally.

Are we not now observing a complete inversion? Basically, does this *fear* of rape not itself cry out for rape? Just as there are faces that ask to be slapped, can one not speak of women who ask to be raped?" (156). Faced with such a provocative suggestion, it is crucial to distinguish again between the reality of everyday experience and the reality of Jamesonian political allegory. Fanon's reasoning is troublingly misogynistic if we consider the women to whom he refers to be embodied individuals. But if we consider them to be literary creations like Madge and Lula, "socially symbolic acts" in Jameson's terms, we can read them as textual embodiments—political allegories—of the prohibition against miscegenation, and see the "complete inversion" of desire and violence they represent. Lula inverts desire by describing her desire for Clay as his desire for her, and inverts violence by telling him, "You're a murderer, Clay, and you know it" (21), then killing him. Lula as walking prohibition represents the way the miscegenation taboo always contains its own inversions, totalizingly causing any black male orientation toward interracial sex to be outside the normativity of civil society.

Like Madge, Lula quite consciously decides to exercise the power her structural position provides her. Catching Clay's eye through the train window, she "beings very premeditatedly to smile" (4), then enters the train, finds him, and asks, "Weren't you staring at me through the window? [… I] saw you staring through that window down in the vicinity of my ass and legs" (6-7). Clay is more naïve than Bob, who instantly realizes Madge's motives and the danger she poses. Clay is surprised by Lula's question, responding, "Wow, now I admit that I was looking in your direction. But the rest of that weight is yours" (7). He attempts to respond to Lula's provocations and accusations as if they are "party talk" and "sex talk" (8)—he is a twentieth century version of the black men Ida B. Wells describes as succumbing to the smiles of white women.

Clay does not realize the danger he is in, even as Lula becomes more aggressive about imposing her own perception of his "well-known type" (12) onto him—she says confidently, "I know you like the palm of my hand" (17); she forces him to see himself as the afterlife of slavery, saying, "Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard" (18); and most provocatively—just as Madge sets into motion the exchange of racial epithets that loses Bob his job; just as Fanon's corporeal schema is shattered by the words "Look, a nigger!" in that other famous interracial encounter on a train—she taunts, "I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger" (19). Just as Bob feels the urge to rape and murder in defiance of the anti-blackness he encounters even while knowing that those actions would only spring the trap of lynch sexuality, Lula's accusation, "You're a murderer, Clay, and you know it" (21) is echoed from his own mouth in Scene II, when he drops his "party talk" tone and passionately rants, "Just shut up. You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know anything. […] I could murder you now. Such a tiny ugly throat. I could squeeze it flat, and watch you turn blue, on a humble" (33). In the play's longest monologue, he continues, "And I'm the great would-be poet. […] Some kind of bastard literature… all it needs is a simple knife thrust. Just let me bleed you, you loud whore, and one poem vanished. A whole people of neurotics, struggling to keep from being sane. And the only thing that would cure the neurosis would be your murder" (35). The violence and militantism that emerges in Clay when he is provoked too far accord well with Baraka's philosophy; just as the Black Arts movement identifies itself as the aesthetic wing of the Black Power movement, Clay analogizes a poem written to cure the black race of "neurosis" with the act of murder of a white person. And yet, despite his protestation that Lula does not know what she is talking about, he is voicing confirmation of precisely her accusation—her *a priori* assumption—that he is a murderer. Just like Bob, Clay is caught in a double bind. If he

does not murder, he is subject to Lula's ongoing anti-blackness; if he does murder, he fulfills the prophecy Lula has made and ensures his own violent punishment. And just like Bob, Clay ultimately does not have the opportunity to act on his impulse to murder. When he tries to disengage from Lula and leave the train, she stabs and murders him. With the implicit alibi of rape that is assumed in the interaction between a black man and a white woman, she gains the complicity of the other passengers on the train, who oblige her orders to "Get this man off me!" and "Open the door and throw his body out" (37). Just like the Marine in Bob's dreams who punishes him for killing a white man while simultaneously laughing and bragging about how his fellow white men have killed so many black people, Lula is structurally protected from punishment for her murder of Clay.

Lynch sexuality is the impossibility of normative sexual interactions between a black man and a white woman; what Marriott calls "an identification between blackness and sexual guilt"; a tool for shattering the black corporeal schema and replacing it with a racial epidermal one; an element of political economy that ensures the ongoing domination of white supremacy. It appears in Himes's protest novel, Baldwin's unaffiliated writings, and Baraka's Black Arts play. From Wells's 1895 pamphlet to Baraka's 1964 play, lynch sexuality transcends regionalism and narrow historical era, defies what Goldsby names the "disappearance thesis," and continues to dominate psychic, material, sexual, and political structures in contemporary black literature.

Chapter Four:

What Does the Black Lesbian Want?: Interracial Sex and Racial Antagonism in Audre Lorde's *Zami* and Ann Allen Shockley's *Loving Her*

While Chapter Three examined the increasing prevalence of sexual interactions between black men and white women as contemporary literature's yardstick of black men's continuing unfreedom and subjection to lynch sexuality, it is a curious fact that interracial sexuality between black women and white men is relatively rarely represented in contemporary African American literature outside of texts set during slavery. This is curious because it represents a change from earlier literature. Sex between black women and white men was a common antebellum theme, from slave narratives like *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to novels like *Clotel*.[20] After the Civil War, literary miscegenation took the form of novels about passing, such as *Iola Leroy* and *The House Behind the Cedars*. The phenomenon of passing both reveals a history of miscegenation in the bodies of those light enough to pass, and is deployed to represent the threat of miscegenation occurring unbeknownst to the white(r) participant. Women continued to be the protagonists of passing narratives, such as *Passing* and *Plum Bun*, in the Harlem Renaissance. But literary portrayals of black women having sex with white men declined precipitously from 1945 to the present, just as representations of black men interacting in sexualized ways with

[20] Hortense Spillers points out in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" that terms like "pleasure" and "sexuality" are "dubiously appropriate" in the context of slavery (221), because the coercion inherent in property relations renders the concepts of consent and will inoperative. When I say "sex" in the context of slavery, I do not mean to disguise the fact that much of this sex took the form of violent rape, but nor do I mean to describe sex that occurred between white men and black women without physical violence as, by contrast, inherently pleasurable or as part of the development of a "sexuality" (in the Foucauldian sense), as if coercion were not still a structuring force of the interaction.

white women increased, as seen in *If He Hollers Let Him Go, Invisible Man, Dutchman, Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, *The Man Who Cried I Am*, and *Another Country*.[21] A notable pattern of exceptions to this trend includes novels set during slavery, including *Jubilee, Corregidora, Kindred, Beloved*, and *The Known World*.[22] In the contemporary era, as lynching became less common but continued to haunt the mechanisms of sex and power after the 1930s, and as the civil rights movement and black nationalism changed the scope and objectives of protest in the 50s and 60s, interracial sexual interactions in literature came to represent freedom or a protest against the violent curtailment thereof for black men, and continued vulnerability to the coercive violence of slavery for black women.

An alternative figuration of interracial sexuality appears in texts about black lesbians, such as Ann Allen Shockley's novel *Loving Her* and Audre Lorde's memoir *Zami*. This chapter argues that the history of violent structural relations represented in portrayals of sex between black women and white men must be read back into portrayals of interracial lesbianism such as *Zami* and *Loving Her*, and that doing so displays the potential of intersectional analysis to *distinguish* between the constituent elements of blackness and lesbianism, in contrast to its pitfall of *analogizing* the identities.

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[21] *Another Country* does feature a relationship between Rufus' sister, Ida, and his white best friend, Vivaldo. This portrayal significantly parallels the portrayal of Rufus' own relationship with Leona. As mentioned in Chapter Three, their relationship is doomed by Vivaldo's liberal, colorblind myopia. Similary, interracial sexuality is found in the work of Andrea Lee, but, as she writes in *Sarah Phillips*, "Throughout our short romance we remained incomprehensible to each other, each of us clutching a private exotic vision in the various beds where we made love" (5).

[22] *Kindred* takes place partly in the present and partly during slavery, and juxtaposes a contemporary interracial relationship with the coercion of sexual interactions during slavery; *Corregidora* takes place in the present but represents the traumatic post-memory of coercive sex that occurred during slavery.

I. Armor, Mantle, and Wall: Intersectionality and Structural Antagonism in Audre Lorde's *Zami*

Audre Lorde's 1982 memoir *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, which tells of the contradictions, sufferings, joys, and vulnerabilities of being a black, lesbian, working class student and poet, is a classic text of third wave feminism and of the theoretical model of intersectionality that emerged from third wave feminist interventions. As such, the memoir challenges the whiteness of lesbian feminism and the straight male dominance of black nationalism. However, the formal parallelism of that description is belied by the work that Lorde does to *dis*analogize blackness from womanhood and lesbianism. This reading focuses on *Zami* as a text that demonstrates both the power and pitfalls of intersectional analysis, arguing that while the text does compare identities in leveling ways that lead to deceptively analogizing models like the "house of difference," it is best read for the ways that it insists upon structural differences between blackness and other identities. By reading *Zami* in this double way, I aim to reassess the legacy of intersectionality in light of a paradigmatic analysis that identifies anti-blackness as the founding antagonism of civil society, in contrast to the identity-based conflicts to which anti-blackness is so commonly analogized.

Because blackness is paradigmatically characterized by vulnerability to gratuitous violence and exclusion from civil society, Frank Wilderson refers to the comparison between blackness and other oppressed identities as "the ruse of analogy." Wilderson distinguishes between structural critiques of positionality at the level of political ontology, and the academy's current "ensembles of questions," which are "fixated on specific and 'unique' experiences of the myriad identities that make up those structural positions." He concludes, "This would be fine if the work led us back to a critique of the paradigm; but most of it does not" (6). In distinguishing

between theories of multiple, situated identity that tend toward the individual and those that tend toward a structural critique, Wilderson's analysis points us toward the contradiction at the heart of intersectionality. Intersectionality poses the questions, "Are all differences similar? Can they be analogized?," and answers both "yes" and "no."

The ruse of analogy authorized by intersectionality's rhetoric of multiplicity and indeterminacy caused contemporary responses to third wave feminism to include appending infinite forms of "difference" to what became known as "the list." As Judith Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*,

> The theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list. Through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives, these positions strive to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fail to be complete. […] This illimitable *et cetera*, however, offers itself as a new departure for feminist political theorizing. (182-83)

By dubbing this a "horizontal trajectory," Butler places different forms of oppression in a plane of analogizable equivalence that tends toward an individualized, rather than structural, analysis of oppression. In Butler's transition from "embarrassed" to "illimitable" as a descriptor of the *et cetera*, we see an ambivalence tending toward embrace of the multiplicity and analogizability of differences.

Similarly, Cherrie Moraga writes in *This Bridge Called My Back*, "The joys of looking like a white girl ain't so great since I realized I could be beaten on the street for being a dyke. If my sister's being beaten because she's Black, it's pretty much the same principle. We're both getting beaten any way you look at it." She goes on to say, "In this country, lesbianism is a poverty—as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. The danger lies in

ranking the oppressions" (29). Moraga goes beyond analogy to metaphor when she says that lesbianism *is* a poverty. In the same breath, she says that racial and sexual oppressions function on "the same principle" and cannot be ranked—that is, cannot be distinguished between in terms of severity or volume of suffering they cause; can be metaphorically substituted for one another—but also that we must "acknowledge the specificity of the oppression."

As Wilderson implies, the quest to "acknowledge the specificity of the oppression" can lead us down two very different roads: either toward the illimitable *et cetera*, in which each person's oppression is specific to the point of utterly incomparable uniqueness, *or* toward distinguishing between the constituent elements that form the paradigmatic structures of different identity-based oppressions. Out of the many contradictory voices of third wave feminism, Lorde's is one that, in some key moments, points us away from Butler's illimitable *et cetera* and Moraga's equivalent, unrankable poverties, and toward a paradigmatic analysis of how anti-blackness differs from other identity-based oppressions. I argue that, according to Lorde, blackness is distinguished from womanhood, lesbianism, and economic poverty because it entails categorical vulnerability to gratuitous violence and categorical exclusion from the normativity to which whites may at least aspire.

At first glance, however, Lorde has a lot in common with her contemporary third wave feminists. In *Zami*, she writes:

> *Being women together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being Black together was not enough. We were different. Being Black women together was not enough. We were different. Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different.* […] It was a while before we came to realize

> that our place was the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference. (226)

The "house of difference" model perfectly illustrates the contradiction I describe in intersectionality. Even as the passage's content insists that each identity on the list defines her otherness in a unique way, the parallel structure and formal repetitiveness of the sentences labor to analogize the identities, implying that, as Moraga says, they function on "the same principle." "Different" ceases to signify a particular distinction from another signifier, and becomes an essential quality of every individual. By the transitive property, if women, gay-girls, Black people, and Black dykes are all "different," they are therefore somehow the same. The repetitive proliferation of categories of "difference" is logically akin to Butler's *et cetera*, and, as such, is an implied target of Wilderson's remarks on the failure of dominant theoretical models to perform a paradigmatic, structural critique of anti-blackness.

However, Lorde also demonstrates the potential power of intersectional analysis to perform precisely such a critique. Elsewhere in *Zami*, she writes, "I was gay and Black. The latter fact was irrevocable: armor, mantle, and wall" (180). Blackness as irrevocable armor suggests the way blackness, like gender, is read on the surface of the body, but also, in contrast, the way that violence and survival in the face of violence are its inseparable constituent elements. If the "fact" of blackness is "irrevocable," this is not the kind of "armor" one can remove and lay aside in between battles; rather, it takes on aspects of the "flesh" that Hortense Spillers argues is "the concentration of 'ethnicity' that contemporary critical discourses neither acknowledge nor discourse away" (207); the flesh that as "a primary narrative" is "seared, divided, […] riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard" (206). Armor-as-flesh in the case of blackness contrasts with Lorde's intricate descriptions of the surface-level self-styling of lesbians in the bar

life, who manipulate the surfaces of their bodies to create nonnormative, discursively coded gender performances. Next in Lorde's sequence of metaphors, the word "mantle" continues the surface/flesh tension established by "armor," in its meaning of "a protective garment or loose, sleeveless cloak" and the derivative metaphorical meaning, something that envelops, conceals or obscures. But "mantle" also bridges the distance between "armor" and "wall" by introducing an architectural—quite literally structural—element, as a variant of "mantelpiece." Finally, blackness as wall is both a material human construction and an immoveable barrier—in other words, a structural antagonism. In sum, Lorde deliberately metaphorizes blackness with a series of material, architectural vehicles, rather than analogizing it to sexuality or class. Based on the architectural irrevocability of blackness that inheres on the surface of her flesh, Lorde points out in the same passage the fallacy of analogizing blackness and lesbianism. She sarcastically describes her white lesbian friends' assumptions: "[O]f course, gay people weren't racists. After all, didn't they know what it was like to be oppressed?" (180).

This conflict is played out in an intimate context in her partnership with a white woman, Muriel: "Even Muriel seemed to believe that as lesbians, we were all outsiders and all equal in our outsiderhood. 'We're all niggers,' she used to say, and I hated to hear her say it. It was wishful thinking based on little fact; the ways in which it was true languished in the shadow of those many ways in which it would always be false" (203). Muriel functions as a synecdochic embodiment of non-black lesbian feminism, clearly inspired by statements like Moraga's, quoted earlier, that equate racism, sexism, and homophobia. While the two lovers connect over their sex- and sexuality-based oppressions, Muriel falsely analogizes the nature of these sufferings by comparing them to blackness. In this passage, Lorde splits the hair between being "all outsiders" and being "equal in our outsiderhooder," indicating that there are in fact degrees of and

inequalities within outsiderhood. Lorde acknowledges that there are some "ways in which [Muriel's statement is] true," while emphasizing that it is possible to measure the degree to which—or the depth of the shadow cast by the fact that—"it would always be false." When Muriel says, in bad faith, "We're all niggers," she deploys blackness metaphorically as the constitutive outside of white capacity within civil society, and simultaneously disavows the difference between blackness and other forms of outsiderhood.

The distinction between the white lesbian and the black one is precisely the difference between Muriel's eligibility for and Lorde's preclusion from the normativity of civil society. While Muriel is harassed on the street by white immigrant women, who normativizingly offer her free dresses and skirts if she will only stop threatening their systems of heterosexuality and binary gender, Lorde writes, "I *knew* there was nothing I could do, including wearing skirts and being straight, that would make me acceptable to the little old Ukrainian ladies who sunned themselves on the stoops of Seventh Street and pointed fingers at Muriel and me as we walked past, arm in arm" (204). Although Muriel, an Italian American, shares the outsiderhood of being a woman and an immigrant with the little old Ukrainian ladies, they are all sutured into civil society by their common bond of being subject to white norms of gender and sexuality—whether rewarded for correctly performing them or punished for failing to do so—in contrast to Lorde's categorical exclusion from the ability to do or be anything, "including wearing skirts and being straight," that would earn her the rewards accorded to those who live normatively in civil society.

In conclusion, with the growing historical distance between the upheavals of third wave feminism and our present moment, and the intervening evidence that academic and cultural responses have failed to accomplish the revolutionary leveling of structural oppression dreamed

of by third wave feminists and intersectionalists, we have the opportunity to revisit *Zami* to see both how it is representative of the immobilizing individualism of the illimitable *et cetera*, and also how it points toward a structural critique of anti-blackness. Although the reception histories of the two texts diverge vastly, a similar critique of the structural violence undergirding relations between black and white lesbians can also be found in *Zami*'s predecessor, *Loving Her*, to which I now turn.

II. "If She Feels Like It": Desire, Volition, and Racial Antagonism in Ann Allen Shockley's *Loving Her*

Looking back to eight years before *Zami* appeared in print, Ann Allen Shockley's 1974 *Loving Her* is widely recognized as the first novel published in America to feature an explicitly black lesbian protagonist.[23] This distinction is inherently intersectional; neither the first lesbian novel nor the first African American one by a long shot, *Loving Her* makes literary history by combining these attributes in the character of Renay Davis. *Loving Her* is similar to *Zami* in its descriptions of both the utopian possibilities and the structural antagonisms inherent in an interracial lesbian relationship. While much of the novel labors to show what the black and white lesbian have in common and thereby make a plea for coalitional inclusion, its depictions of desire, volition, fatherhood, and futurity also reveal not only the antagonism between black and

[23] As Alycee Lane describes, "*Loving Her* is a groundbreaking text […]; not only is it the first African American novel written with an explicitly lesbian theme, but it is the first to feature a black lesbian as its protagonist" (v). She importantly distinguishes between the novel's arguably cryptically homoerotic precursors, such as Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and *Passing*, and the explicitly named lesbianism of *Loving Her*. Madhu Dubey writes that *Loving Her* "cannot be written off as poor or insignificant fiction. *Loving Her* is nonrepresentative but highly significant as the only novel published by a black woman in the 1970s that follows its critique of heterosexuality to an unapologetic affirmation of lesbianism. […] *Loving Her* stands virtually alone, then, in unequivocally celebrating lesbianism as 'what comes naturally'" (152).

white, but the way this antagonism makes a fundamental difference between the relations of blackness and whiteness to lesbianism.

Renay is a talented piano player who abandons her college education to marry the man who has raped and impregnated her. After years of suffering, she leaves her abusive, often-absent, black husband, Jerome Lee, for an enlightened, rich, white, lesbian writer, Terry Bluvard. Her relationship with Terry often resembles a lesbian feminist utopia of "loving and being loved by women in mutuality and integrity" (Rich 641) in its explicit descriptions, causing some critics to see the novel as a celebration of white tolerance at the expense of black homophobia. However, I argue that the narrator's anxious obsession with issues of desire and volition and an extended structure of allusion to *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* signal readers that we should look beyond the characters' declarations of equality and love, and notice the many inequalities and forms of domination that intimately structure the libidinal economy of the relationship. Shockley continually cues readers to contrast the novel's surface declarations and expository statements with its descriptions of the actual interactions between characters.

The novel's tragic element occurs not as a punishment for Renay's lesbian transgressions, but as an inevitable element of her blackness. Jerome pursues her, discovers that she has left him for a "bulldagger," and beats her within an inch of her life. Later, he takes their daughter, Denise, from Renay's mother's house and inadvertently kills her in a drunk driving accident, escaping alive himself. Although Renay wonders if she is being punished for her lesbianism, the novel's sentimental closure relies on abjecting the absent, too-present black father in favor of the white lesbian. Building on work by Hortense Spillers and David Marriott, I will analyze the allegorization of Jerome as absent father and Denise as impossible futurity to demonstrate the

effects of a consideration of blackness on queer theoretical concepts such as those advanced by Lee Edelman in *No Future*.

In reading Shockley's allegorization of racial antagonisms as intentional and critical, I depart from previous critics. For example, Alycee Lane both praises the novel for "construct[ing] desire as exceeding and transcending race" (xii) but—as a negative corollary—charges that one of the text's "weaknesses" is that it "represents Renay and Terry's relationship as devoid of racial tension" (vii). In doing so, Lane privileges the characters' conscious declarations and ignores the unspoken patterns of inequality and racialized domination the characters actually perform. Another critic, Lee Ann Elgie, summarizes these inequalities quite aptly, but insists that they are an unconscious oversight: "On the surface of this novel, many issues of race, economics, gender, and sexuality converge within Renay, and they all appear to resolve themselves. […] Upon closer scrutiny […], racist, capitalist, patriarchal, and heterosexist ideologies are subtly perpetuated in multiple forms" (252). Elgie tellingly insists, "I am not suggesting that this discrepancy between performance and intention is a conscious effort on Shockley's part" (254).

Despite garnering criticism for being didactic in tone, Shockley's message is far from straightforward. However, despite disagreement on other fronts, critics have almost universally united in criticizing Shockley's representation for failing to represent the possibility of independent, intraracial black lesbianism. In her survey of black women's fiction from the 1970s in relation to black nationalism, Madhu Dubey skewers the book for equating lesbianism and non-blackness:

> Lesbianism in *Loving Her* entails alienation from the black community and integration with a liberal community of white homosexual men and women. All traces of Renay's

> black past, including her husband, her black female friends, her hometown community, her love of soul food, and most disconcertingly, her daughter, have to be expelled from her life before her lesbian relationship with a white woman can be established and affirmed. (152)

She concludes, "In order to construct itself as a lesbian novel, then, *Loving Her* forfeits any claims to being a black novel, thus ensuring its own exclusion from most critical attempts to map the black fiction of this period" (153). She also critiques the novel (along with other fiction of the era) for "retreat[ing] from a thorough diagnosis of the structural determinants of oppression to a celebration of the individual's power to resist or transcend her oppressive conditions. Transferring the problem of historical change from a social to an individual level, these novels take recourse to a liberal humanist vision of political change as originating in the free choice of an individual subject" (158). Dubey here echoes Jewelle Gomez's assessment that "[t]he main flaw in Shockley's work is not dissimilar from that of her white counterparts: the inability to place a Black Lesbian in a believable cultural context in an artful way. Continued failure to do this denies the validity of the Black Lesbian in literature and history" (114). Similarly, in *Looking Like What You Are*, Lisa Walker accuses, "*Loving Her* is not so much a novel in which the black lesbian subject emerges as it is a novel in which the black lesbian subject gets subsumed into the white lesbian community" (127).

I contend that Dubey, Gomez, and Walker are correct in identifying an underlying antithesis between blackness and lesbianism in the book, but incorrect in attributing it solely to "the ideological limits that determine what is readable at a given literary and historical conjuncture," namely, the conjuncture in which black nationalism censoriously ruled lesbianism to be outside the realm of authentic blackness (Dubey 153). I contend that what these critics

sense in Shockley's work is not only a representational, symbolic impasse, but a violent and material one as well; not only a conflict between black nationalists and black lesbians, but an antagonism between blackness and white normative sexuality, allegorically encoded as the absence of black lesbian "cultural context" or community. As I argued in Chapter Two, participation in the web of normativity that gives individuals a presumption of innocence and the ability to "fall" into categories of marginalized sexual nonnormativity such as lesbianism—rather than to find themselves there *a priori*—is a non-black prerogative. While Terry frets about the hardships Renay will *suddenly* face as a result of her newfound lesbianism, Renay wonders, "How could she convince her that she wasn't and never would be regretful, even if it meant losing her identity in Terry's world?" (37). Terry worries, "I hope you can stand this life. Sometimes you have to harden yourself to everything and everyone," to which Renay responds, "Terry—you forget—I'm black. We're hardened as soon as we come into this world. It's as if our skin's a hard dark shell to hide and protect all the hurts to come" (37). To have to harden oneself, painful as it is, is categorically different from coming into the world already hardened, wearing a fleshy, epidermalized, "hard dark shell" that is at once the occasion for and an armor (in Lorde's word) against all the hurts to come.

By identifying as lesbian above and against her identification as black—losing her identity in Terry's world, as Dubey criticizes—Renay participates in what Frank Wilderson calls a "structural adjustment": "signing on the dotted line means feigning ontological capacity regardless of the fact that Blackness is incapacity in its most pure and unadulterated form. It means theorizing Blackness as 'borrowed institutionality'" (38). In other words, to join an oppressed group within civil society is a lever with which to move out of the category of blackness—not a horizontal move that promises coalition and intersection. Renay's structural

adjustment is possible (possible, at least, on the surface) precisely because, as Dubey criticizes, it operates on the individual level and leaves the structural paradigm of blackness—social death and vulnerability to gratuitous violence—unchanged, or worse, reinforced, in the characters of Jerome as absent father and Denise as impossible futurity. To approach Shockley's vision of racial antagonism, I will digress through a mode of considering blackness and humanity provided by Frantz Fanon.

In the Introduction of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon frames the questions that motivate the book's composition, a composition he insists upon completing despite the fact that "No one has asked me for it. Especially those to whom it is directed" (7):

> From all sides dozens and hundreds of pages assail me and try to impose their wills on me. But a single line would be enough. Supply a single answer and the color problem would be stripped of all its importance.
>
> What does a man want?
>
> What does the black man want?
>
> At the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man.
>
> There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell.
>
> Man is not merely a possibility of recapture or of negation. If it is true that consciousness is a process of transcendence, we have to see too that this transcendence is haunted by the problems of love and understanding. Man is a *yes* that vibrates to cosmic harmonies. Uprooted, pursued, baffled, doomed to watch the dissolution of the truths that

> he has worked out for himself one after another, he has to give up projecting onto the world an antinomy that coexists with him.
>
> The black is a black man; that is, as the result of a series of aberrations of affect, he is rooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated.
>
> The problem is important. I propose nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself. We shall go very slowly, for there are two camps: the white and the black. […]
>
> The black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to reach a human level. (7-9)

Fanon acknowledges that to be (hu)man is a "process of transcendence" that necessarily involves being "[u]prooted, pursued, baffled, doomed to watch the dissolution of the truths that he has worked out for himself one after another." Just like Baldwin's David, Fanon's (hu)man experiences alienation, uprootedness, and suffering. However, to have the capacity to suffer and transcend as a (hu)man is categorically different from being "an antinomy that coexists with" the (hu)man. While the phrase "black man" seems to denote the intersection of "black" and "man," Fanon in fact indicates the devastating fact that there *is* no intersection between the "cosmic *yes*" and its antinomy when he says, "The black is a black man; that is, […] he is rooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated." When the adjective "black" modifies the word "man," Fanon finds not a blackened version of the universal human experience, but rather a being in need of "liberation […] from himself." Fanon indicates the vital role of the black man as antinomy in the constitution of the human by equating the "universe" with "the man of color"—the black man must be extricated from the universe, and the man of color must be liberated from himself; by the transitive property, the black man is constitutive of the universe. Unenviable as

the struggle to be human amidst alienation and suffering is, the black man is precluded even from that possibility by his role as the constitutive other against which humanity is defined. There is no human essence to the black man beneath layers of social oppression, no kernel to rehabilitate—the black man is identical with what he needs liberation from, and his liberation would mean the end of the world. As Wilderson writes, it is the Human who requires contingent freedom "from the wage relation, […] sexism, homophobia, and patriarchy"; "The Slave needs freedom from the Human race, freedom from the world. The Slave requires gratuitous freedom" (141).

Loving Her poses the question, "What does the black lesbian want?," and finds that the intersectional alterations of sex and sexuality do not alter Fanon's answer. The black lesbian is not a lesbian. The black lesbian wants to be white; the white lesbian slaves to reach a human level. To appropriate Mary Ann Doane's phrase, desire and volition themselves are the prerogative of the white lesbian, while the black lesbian desires to desire.[24] This is emphatically different from saying that black lesbians do not exist, or that same-sex sexual behaviors are a white imposition on the black population. Fanon's devastating phrase, "The black is a black man," gives us a way to think about how an adjective can utterly negate the noun it modifies while allowing the noun to persist, suggesting precisely from what the noun is excluded by its adjective. So although the phrase "black lesbians" undeniably has historical, material referents, the adjective "black" modifies the word "lesbian" so extremely that it could be said that the black lesbian is not a lesbian, and that the black lesbian desires to desire.

[24] In *The Desire to Desire*, Doane argues that although the male gaze of cinema clearly objectifies women and invites male subjects to desire, something must explain the appeal of film to female viewers; she describes women's provisional, incomplete gaze as possessing "the desire to desire" while being precluded from desire itself. While this is an insightful distinction, Doane bases her analysis entirely on the experience of white women as if it were universal, therefore missing the *a priori* exclusion of blackness.

In distinguishing between desire and the desire to desire, it important to distinguish between the myth of absolute agency (what a Lacanian might call possessing the phallus), the always already compromised desire and volition of the typical human subject, and the *a priori* coercion and nonnormativity that foreclose the exercise even of such limited agency. I understand desire and volition to encompass actions undertaken with deliberate intention, sexual desires and preferences, and the capacity to attempt to alter the world to conform to one's fantasies of it. Desire and volition *always* operate embedded within materiality and embodiment, and in a context of power relations that pre-exists the desirer. No one's desire is innate and free; no one's volition is omnipotent. However, as the relationship between Terry and Renay allegorizes, the black lesbian is subject to such a degree of coercion *a priori* that she does not even possess the mediated and insufficient capacities of desire and volition that the white subject does.

Shockley's novel poses the question, "What does the black lesbian want?," through its anxious fixation on Renay's capacity for desire and volition. Terry and Renay discuss desire in an overwhelming number of petty, quotidian instances, mostly revolving around food, drink, music, and sex. Terry is ostentatiously solicitous of Renay, as demonstrated by this incomplete catalogue:

> "Anything you feel like playing. Want a drink?" (12)
>
> "Sit down. Renay—isn't it? Would you like a drink?" (20)
>
> "'Would you like to go home with me for a drink?" Terry asked, not looking at her. (25)
>
> "What do you want to drink?" Terry asked, going into the dining room with its small built-in bar. "The usual?" (26)
>
> Terry's breath quickened as she asked softly in the darkness, "Do you feel like it?" (37)

Terry glanced at Renay. “If she feels like it.” (67)

“Do you really want to go to the party?” (68)

“I hope you’ll like it here.” (69)

“I’ll take a martini. Would you like a manhattan, Renay?” (70)

“What would you like to drink, Renay? Scotch, gin, bourbon—” Terry reached for the bourbon bottle. (74)

“We’ll take a shower, eat and do whatever you feel like doing before you go to work.” (102)

“Well, how do you want to spend the rest of the afternoon?” (104)

At first blush, this solicitousness seems to be a feature of the utopian space, ostensibly immune to racism, that the two lesbian feminists create together. Terry’s tone is certainly far different from Jerome’s orders to shut up and cook, his nonconsensual sale of Renay’s piano, and the rape that occasions their marriage. Renay’s volition is highlighted when she leaves Jerome for Terry: “To go where she wanted to go—the only place she wanted to be” (2). Once she flees to Terry’s, “For the first time in a long while, she was free to do what she wanted when she felt like it, not bound by a routine that had to be followed for someone else. She was free to rest as long as she wished, and to be completely alone with herself and her thoughts” (81). In the characters’ conscious thoughts and self-representations, the relationship is reciprocal and equal, and provides Renay with unprecedented access to volition and desire. However, underexamined power dynamics clearly exist between the two women, manifested as class inequality and butch/femme relations, but ultimately pointing toward the impossibility of black volition in the face of the power of whiteness. In this way, Shockley layers both a utopian vision of a possible raceless lesbian future *and* a critique of current racial antagonisms into her novel. Critics who

have noted the inequalities between Terry and Renay at all have almost universally attributed them to Shockley's unconscious reproduction of dominant paradigms, as the conclusion to Le-Ann Elgie's brief review of the book, noted ealier, exemplifies: "I am not suggesting that this discrepancy between performance and intention is a conscious effort on Shockley's part" (254). In contrast, I want to consider the theoretical implications of assuming that Shockley *intends* to portray the intractable inequalities between the black and white lesbians as well as the possibility of a lesbian utopia.

The class inequality between the women allows Terry to *appear* to extend her own privileges to Renay in the form of gifts, housing, and money, while actually exercising ownership of Renay as if she were another possession. This is most clearly stated when Terry buys Renay a ring to replace the wedding ring she flushes down the toilet when she leaves Jerome. When she notices that the ring is gone, "Terry took her hand, kissing each finger. The kisses left rings of warmth. 'I'll buy you another tomorrow. You belong to me now'" (88). And when she fulfills her promise:

> The ring slipped easily onto her finger, and for the first time, Renay felt as if she really belonged to someone.
>
> "See—I didn't forget. It's just that it took me a while to decide what I thought suited you." Then anxiously: "Do you like it?"
>
> Renay hugged Terry close to her, not wanting her to see the tears. The ring was a small gold band with two diamonds in the center. "I love it!"
>
> "Good! Now I've branded you." Terry's arms closed around her. (104-05)

Despite Lane's claims that their relationship is free from racial strife, Shockley's choice of language here cannot be accidental. The motif of possession is first subtly introduced with

Renay's feeling that she "really belongs" to Terry. Belonging has a double resonance, as a term of affiliation and kinship, and as a term of unidirectional domination and possession.[25] The fact that branding is a rather inapt metaphor for putting a ring on someone's finger emphasizes that the grounds of the comparison lie not in physical similarity but in the fact that the sentimental feeling of belonging has a real, material referent in the relationship of unidirectional ownership that pertains between the women. This unidirectional ownership is reasserted in a later sex scene: "The light magic of Terry's hand sought and crept into the forest of her, covering the enclosure, imprisoning it, remaining—a butterfly without flight. 'Mine—all mine'" (140). Renay never voices a matching feeling of possession over Terry. Similarly, symptomatically, the conversation discussed above in which Terry frets about Renay hardening herself in the lesbian life, only to have Renay respond that she was born hardened, ends abruptly with Terry initiating sex—"Do you feel like it?" (37)—instead of acknowledging the ontological difference between blackness and lesbianism that Renay has just pinpointed. Terry sutures over a possibility for true, painful communication with a performance of soliciting Renay's desire and consent. This pattern is repeated on another occasion, when Renay muses that it is unbelievable that she should love Terry despite her whiteness and Terry blithely responds, "Darling, love knows no color. […] You're thinking too much this morning. Education is going to your head. I'll have to put a stop

[25] Trimiko Melancon notes the use of the former of the two senses of "belonging" when she analyzes a passage from the novel that reads, Terry's "tongue went into the cavern of her mouth like it belonged there, joining hers[. …] She didn't want Terry to stop. She wanted the lips and hands to return to her—to where they belonged" (Shockley 27). Melancon writes, "Mainly through the use of a rhetoric of belonging—Terry's tongue belonging in the caverns of Renay's mouth, as well as Renay's wanting Terry's lips and hands to return 'where they belonged'—Shockley challenges heteronormativity by demonstrating that intimacy and sexual desire are not restricted solely to heterosexual relationships" (649). Melancon does not, however, contemplate belonging's double edge.

to that, right now!" (100). To stop her from "thinking too much," Terry seduces Renay, again applying the suture of lesbian sexual pleasure to the wound of racial antagonism.

In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman demonstrates how performances of volition, desire, and consent actually contribute to, rather than mitigate, the violent domination of the slave. She writes that "rather than bespeaking the mutuality of social relations or the expressive and affective capacities of the subject, sentiment, enjoyment, affinity, will, and desire facilitated subjugation, domination, and terror precisely by preying upon the flesh, the heart, and the soul" (5). Eliciting performances of contentment and joy both increases the psychological domination of the enslaved, and increases the ideological hegemony through which non-enslaved onlookers view enslavement as justified. In the passage quoted above, Terry's anxious question, "Do you like it?," and her concern for what "suits" Renay are just such solicitations of contentment in the state of possession.

To extend Hartman's analysis to Renay's condition is not an analogy, but a historical continuation. When Terry and Renay first meet, Terry shows her hand honestly: "I'm wealthy. I'm used to getting what I want, even if it means buying it. You've probably guessed what I am by now, or else you're terribly naive. I'm one of those women who prefers her own sex and I want you. However, trite as it may sound, I want you for real. But I won't bother you if you don't want me to" (22-23). Terry threatens Renay with the power of sheer coercion in the form of purchase, but then cements her power by forcing Renay to perform the role of being possessed "for real"—offering up her emotional and intellectual essence, in addition to her physical body, for Terry's enjoyment. Underneath a surface respect for Renay's desire in the offer "I won't bother you if you don't want me to," there lies an asymmetry between the options facing the two women. Terry can either buy Renay, or coax her into giving herself "for real"; Renay can either

be bought, give herself voluntarily, or opt to be left alone and return to her life of abject poverty and violence. Renay's performance of choice occurs within a foreclosed field of possibility, in which her ownership of Terry is inconceivable. One hears echoes of Terry's threat to get what she wants, even if it means buying it, in the narrator's free indirect discourse description of Jerome's response to Renay's flight: "She was a commodity to him, something he had bought with a wedding license and, like all possessions, was a part of his army of belongings. To him, losing her was a loss of property" (42). Terry offers Renay volition, desire, and sentimental belonging not *instead* of possession and material belonging, but *in addition* to it; this is her innovation over Jerome's failed strategy of brute force, which can be evaded by flight.

Renay's status as a commodity among Terry's possessions is emphasized in another conflict between the characters' explicit declarations and the underlying power dynamics in their material interactions: namely, Renay describes herself as a free and cherished guest, while actually performing the roles of maid and cook in Terry's household. As Angela Davis writes, "The enervating domestic obligations of women in general provide flagrant evidence of the power of sexism. Because of the added intrusion of racism, vast numbers of Black women have had to do their own housekeeping and other women's home chores as well" (238). Davis summarizes the history of black women's labor as maids; at its peak in 1930, three out of five employed black women worked as domestic servants (238). The racialization of domestic wage labor underlies the domestic relations between Terry and Renay. When they first arrive at Terry's apartment, Renay's daughter asks, "Is Mommy going to be your maid?," to which Terry responds, "No. Your mommy's my friend—my very dearest friend" (5). Despite Terry's sentimental avowals to the contrary and Renay's disdain for maids, however, Terry quickly and unspokenly falls into the pattern of treating Renay as maid and cook. When Renay remarks that

Terry rarely cooks at home, Terry responds, "It's too much trouble. I like your cooking, though. Tomorrow we'll stock up" (5). With no further discussion—and no hint as to Renay's reaction to her new role as cook—Terry "carelessly stuff[s money] into her purse" (7) so she can take over the chore of grocery shopping. Terry's use of the pronoun "we" is a polite fiction, or else indicates that Renay is an extension of Terry[26]; Renay does the shopping and cooking by herself. Similarly, Renay unspokenly assumes the role of maid: "The days had a pattern. After dropping Denise at school, she would return to the apartment and prepare Terry's breakfast of grapefruit juice, eggs, toast and the strong black coffee Terry liked. There were so many little things that Terry ignored. She didn't like to make a bed, cook or hang up clothes. These Renay did while Terry read over her night writing" (39). Again, a relation of coercion is disguised as sentiment and preference. Terry doesn't clean up after herself because she doesn't *like* to, implying that Renay must perform the tasks for her because she *does* like to, not because of a relationship of dominance between the two women. The days spontaneously assume a pattern that simply happens to perfectly correspond to Terry's desires.

The two can joke about the power dynamic between them, but never admit it into serious conversation. When Terry is in the market for a new maid after firing her old one for offenses described below, Renay adopts a false Southern black dialect that simultaneously points to slavery as the source of Terry's power over her, while also disavowing its own content through ironic humor: "'No need, ma'am. Y'all got yo' cleanin' woman right h'yar wif y'all, and sho' nuff!' Renay mocked. One thing about us black folks, she thought, we got a sense of humor, and thank God, for that's what has kept us sane all through the centuries" (54). Renay disavows her

[26] Here I allude to Patterson's description: "Another feature of the coercive aspect of slavery is its individualized condition: the slave was usually powerless in relation to another individual. […] In his powerlessness the slave became an extension of his master's power. He was a human surrogate, recreated by his master with god-like power in his behalf" (4).

own meaning by adopting a false speaking voice, but also indicates the continuity of her experience with "black folks […] through the centuries" through the voice and its humor.

Terry's implicit assumption that Renay will act as her maid and cook takes a spoken and subsequently disavowed form in the person of Miss Wilby. When Renay is home alone and the regular cleaning woman, an unpleasant white woman, comes by, she too asks if Renay is the new maid: "The question was both an accusation and insult to Renay. Because she was black, she had to be the maid" (50). Suspicious of her presence, Miss Wilby follows up by asking, "You doing any kind of work for her?," to which Renay replies "curtly," "No, I'm *not* doing any kind of work for her" (51). As in the earlier example of her "buying" and "branding" Renay being forgiven in contrast to the indictment of Jerome's treatment of her as "one of his possessions," Terry is let off the hook for treating Renay as the maid while the actual maid takes all the blame for making a "false" assumption. Renay simultaneously despises Miss Wilby for assuming that she is a maid or laborer because she's black, and despises her for stooping to do the black work of house cleaning: Renay's "mother had to do that kind of work because there was nothing else she could do. But this woman had a white face—the passkey to all gates of opportunity—and yet she was cleaning floors" (52). With her multifaceted derision of the white maid, Renay both dreams of a world in which blackness and maidliness are not identical, and acknowledges that in the current structure of racial antagonism, maidliness *is* despicably beneath anyone who possesses a white face.

The narrator here prioritizes an analysis of race over one of class. In describing the woman's privilege as the *possession* of a white face, rather than *being* white, the narrator echoes a common trope in black literature that also happens to be a historical point of legal contention. In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, one of the plaintiff's arguments was that being removed from the white-

only train car exposed him to loss of the reputation of whiteness, which, because of its attendant access to economic and social opportunities, could be considered a form of property. Albion Tourgee, attorney for the plaintiff, described the inequality of wealth and opportunity between black and white people in America, and asked rhetorically, "Under these conditions, is it possible to conclude that *the reputation of being white* is not property? Indeed, is it not the most valuable sort of property, being the master-key that unlocks the golden door of opportunity?" (qtd. in Harris 1748). What Shockley calls the "passkey," Tourgee more pointedly calls the "master-key."

In echoing Tourgee, the narrator also anticipates Cheryl Harris's description of "whiteness as property"—whiteness is the "passkey to all gates of opportunity," in Shockley's phrase, or the possession that gives its bearer access to all other possessions, in Harris's theorization. Based partially on the legal issues raised by Tourgee's argument, as well as on the history of slavery, Jim Crow, and their lasting material effects in the present, Harris writes,

> The origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination. Even in the early years of the country, it was not the concept of race alone that operated to oppress Blacks and Indians; rather, it was the *interaction* between conceptions of race and property that played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination.
>
> The hyper-exploitation of Black labor was accomplished by treating Black people themselves as objects of property. Race and property were thus conflated by establishing a form of property contingent on race—only Blacks were subjugated as slaves and treated as property. (1716)

By giving a history of "property" rather than "class," Harris demonstrates the relative irrelevance of distinguishing between race and class in determining a person's relation to wealth and opportunity. Race, when understood in the context of slavery as a characteristic that defines one's legal relationship to property—as possessor or possessed—*is* class, at least as far as the possessed are concerned. Possession allows for a diverse range of class possibilities for those who possess, but a static relation to property for those possessed. There is a difference of degree between those who possess much and those who possess little, but there is a difference of kind between those who possess little and those who are themselves objects of possession. This is the distinction upon which Renay's derision of the white maid hinges: despite possessing the "passkey to all gates of opportunity," Miss Wilby falls into the degraded status of maid that Renay, as if by nature, assumes unconsciously and unspokenly.

The fact that blackness and maidliness are so associated, both in the assumptions of Terry, Denise, and Miss Wilby and in the history of Renay's mother, belies the possible suggestion that socioeconomic class alone is responsible for the inequality in Terry and Renay's relationship. Similarly, one might suggest that the inequality is due to their butch-femme dynamic and as such is a critique of these roles and of the gendered inequalities of marriage. The novel comes closest to explicitly identifying the couple as butch and femme when Renay dances with a butch woman unsubtly named Stony, and thinks, "*She's like Terry and yet she isn't like her*" (77). Their roles are also played out in numerous subtle, coded interactions; to give just one of many possible examples, Terry incorporates a difference in gendered signifiers into the way she prepares drinks: "'What's that you're playing?' Terry asked, bringing their drinks in frosted glasses, a cherry in one and an olive garnishing the other. […] 'I like it,' Terry remarked, handing her the glass with the cherry" (12). Without discussion, Terry imposes the feminine

signifier of the cherry onto Renay's alcoholic consumption and reserves the more masculine olive for herself. The meanings of butch and femme roles are famously disputed in feminist and queer theory, but it is clear that they are more than simple imitations of masculine and feminine roles and oppressions. However, the novel does justify a direct comparison between Renay and Terry's butch-femme relationship and a heterosexual marriage: "Their life together resembled that of a married couple, except that they could not proclaim themselves man and wife" (39). Since she incorporates inequality and domination into Terry and Renay's relationship in ways coded as socioeconomic class, butch-femme, and heteronormative marriage roles, is Shockley ultimately critiquing the institution of marriage and the systems of class and patriarchy? Certainly, these critiques are part of her project. However, as I hope to have shown in my analysis of the categorical differences between Terry and Renay's relations to property—registered through metaphors of branding and belonging, reflected in the conflation of blackness and maidliness—the critique of racial antagonism resounds in *Loving Her*. Renay plays the roles of black woman, black femme, black wife, and black maid in such a way that the adjective "black" negates the diversity of the possibilities represented by those nouns, just as in Fanon's formulation, "The black is a black man" (8).

Music is another avenue through which Terry exercises her enjoyment of Renay, and it is here that Shockley's extended allusion to James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* is most revealing. In Johnson's 1912 passing novel, the narrator is an extraordinarily gifted pianist who serves as personal entertainer to a rich white man. Shockley sews obvious references to Johnson and his novel throughout her text. Renay's daughter, Denise, studies one of Johnson's poems in school and is shocked to discover that Terry, a writer herself,

hasn't heard of him; Terry promises to go to the library and read the poem, and Denise declares, "Well! […] At last I've taught *you* something!" (57). To commemorate their cultural exchange, Terry gives her Johnson's book of poems, *God's Trombones*, as a gift (143). More subtly, events of Renay's life mirror the ex-coloured man's, such as being sent to college on scholarships funded by members of their churches and communities who are grateful for hearing their music frequently over their adolescences (Shockley 13, Johnson 50). Both protagonists receive pianos as unexpected gifts from rich white patrons, the ex-coloured man from his father and Renay from Terry. The ex-coloured man reports, "[T]here was evolved from the boards, paper, and other packing-material a beautiful, brand-new, upright piano. […] I at once sat down and ran my fingers over the keys; the full, mellow tone of the instrument was ravishing" (40). Terry presents Renay with "a shiny new baby grand piano" (8), and "Renay ran her fingers experimentally up and down the keys of the beautiful new piano" (11). The ex-coloured man earns the gift of the new piano by the captivating way in which he plays a Chopin waltz for his father (32); Chopin's "Barcarolle" is one of the first songs Renay plays on her new piano (34). It's worth noting that while the ex-coloured man experiences a momentary "feeling of disappointment that the piano was not a grand" (40), Renay's prize *is* a baby grand, a revision which perhaps indicates some modicum of progress in the sixty years between the two texts' publications. In any case, these overt allusions and similarities are enough to indicate that the resemblance of Terry and Renay's relationship to that of the ex-coloured man and his patron is not accidental.

Just like the relationship between Terry and Renay, the relationship between the ex-coloured man and his patron is marked by surface declarations of equality and extreme sentimental attachment, belied by interactions of material inequality and almost absolute domination. Both white characters make decisions of great import and inform their black

counterparts of them without discussion. One night, the ex-coloured man's white gentleman informs him, "'I decided last night that I'd go to Europe tomorrow. I think I'll take you along instead of Walter.' Walter was his valet. It was settled that I should go to his apartments for the rest of the night and sail with him in the morning" (124-25). The decision has already been made; it is not a matter of inviting the ex-coloured man, but rather of "taking" him, as one transports a possession. The passive voice construction "It was settled" and the subjunctive (rather than active) construction "I should go" emphasize the ex-coloured man's absolute lack of volition.

Similarly, at the end of *Loving Her*, Terry announces, "I've been thinking. After you finish school, let's go to Europe. I want you to see Paris with me," and Renay responds, "I'd love to go anywhere with you, Terry" (186). Also in parallel, earlier in the novel and as a more central plot event, Terry decides that she and Renay will give up her rented apartment in the city and move to her inherited suburban estate. She makes this decision after the apartment manager informs her of complaints about black people sharing her apartment, but she "protects" Renay from this knowledge by pretending she has simply made an autonomous choice: "She would protect her home—her own. Renay wasn't going to be embarrassed and neither would Denise. Her thoughts turned around and around slowly like a creaking rustic wheel until she decided what had to be done. Satisfied at her decision, she smiled. She would tell Renay when she returned" (62). Despite her earlier insistence that she wants Renay to show volition in coming to her, Terry "tells" Renay about her impending transportation to the suburbs rather than asking her. Terry's attempt to protect Renay and Denise from embarrassment shows both her condescending mastery and her naivete. When Renay returns, Terry announces, "[W]e're moving. We're going to Willow Wood as soon as we can get the hell out of here" (63). Renay puts up a bit more

resistance than the ex-coloured man, noting disapprovingly the distance from the city, and making it plain that she guesses the real reason behind the move. When Terry is surprised that she has guessed that housing segregation is the ultimate motive for their flight, Renay gives the lie to Terry's feelings of wisdom and competence by explaining, "I'm black. Been black all my life, and will be for the rest of it. That's how I know. Good old darky instinct" (63). However, she still ends up doing Terry's bidding—the moving truck comes the very next day. Furthermore, Terry regains the illusion that Renay is giving herself of her own volition when they arrive at Willow Wood and Renay says, "Oh, Terry, I love it!" (66). Terry anxiously elicits another confirmation by saying, "I hope you'll like it here," to which Renay responds, "I'm here with you. Why shouldn't I like it?" (69).

In addition to dictating his global movements, the rich white patron of Johnson's novel consumes the ex-coloured man's musical talents for his own—some have argued erotic—pleasure and at his own volition. The millionaire discovers the ex-coloured man playing ragtime in a club, and the way wealth structures the power dynamics between them is clear from their first contact: "When I had finished playing, he called a waiter and by him sent me a five-dollar bill. For about a month after that he was at the 'Club' one or two nights each week, and each time after I had played, he gave me five dollars" (116). But, as our discussion of his decision to transport the ex-coloured man to Europe also reflects, this is not the monetary relation that pertains between a rich man and a poor one, but rather the relation of a master and a slave. The narrator continues, "One night he sent for me to come to his table; he asked me several questions about myself; then told me that he had an engagement which he wanted me to fill" (116). Following the ex-coloured man's satisfactory performance at his private party, the millionaire promises him many lucrative future engagements in exchange for complete and exclusive control

over when and where he performs. The possessive nature of this exclusive contract is shown in the narrator's description, "I afterwards played for him at many dinners and parties of one kind or another. Occasionally he 'loaned' me to some of his friends. And, too, I often played for him alone at his apartments" (120). During these private performances, the narrator is compelled to play for hours at the millionaire's discretion and for his pleasure:

> During such moments this man sitting there so mysteriously silent, almost hid in a cloud of heavy-scented smoke, filled me with a sort of unearthly terror. He seemed to be some grim, mute, but relentless tyrant, possessing over me a supernatural power which he used to drive me on mercilessly to exhaustion. But these feelings came very rarely; besides, he paid me so liberally I could forget much. There at length grew between us a familiar and warm relationship, and I am sure he had a decided personal liking for me. On my part, I looked upon him at that time as about all a man could wish to be. (121)

Alternately feeling like a zombie supernaturally compelled to labor in the service of a tyrant and a participant in mutual homosocial familiarity and warmth, the ex-coloured man represses knowledge ("forget[s] much") of the direct compulsion the millionaire exercises over him in favor of a sentimentalized explanation.

Loving Her once again alludes directly to *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*. Terry meets Renay in the club where Renay performs, and buys her attention with a "crisp twenty-dollar bill" and a request for Debussy (19), in parallel to the millionaire's five dollar bills. Terry sends her missive with the owner instead of a waiter, but both rich patrons request that the piano player join them at their table, and both are obeyed. Just as the millionaire coerces the ex-coloured man into an exclusive contract, Terry attempts to convince Renay to stop working at the club. The ex-coloured man writes, "He would sometimes sit for three or four hours hearing me

play, his eyes almost closed, making scarcely a motion except to light a fresh cigarette, and never commenting one way or another on the music. At first I sometimes thought he had fallen asleep and would pause in playing. The stopping of the music always aroused him enough to tell me to play this or that" (121). And just so with Renay: "There were times in the evenings when she played just for Terry, who would lean back, close her eyes and listen appreciatively to the sounds she wove. She would play anything Terry wanted to hear, from Beethoven to Ray Charles" (82). Both the ex-coloured man and Renay do have the ability to escape their white patrons; the ex-coloured man eventually parts from the millionaire to go to the American South, and Renay briefly leaves Terry after Denise's death to recover from her grief. But both characters are strongly bound to their white patrons by a combination of both sentimental and material belonging.

The relationship between the ex-coloured man and the millionaire provides part of the basis for much critical speculation about the use of the passing narrative as a veil for homosexuality, spearheaded by Cheryl Clarke, Philip Brian Harper, and Siobhan Somerville. Somerville identifies both the homoeroticism of the relationship and its replication of the power relations of slavery when she writes that "there is also at work here an implicit analogy between the narrator's relationship with the patron and his mother's relationship with his father: both echo the figure of the slave mistress, who is given a minimal amount of financial and material security in exchange for her sexual service to the white master" (119). Based on the conflict between the narrator's surface declarations of affection and the actual relation of domination, Somerville writes that "Johnson implicitly criticizes the protagonist's inability to see the class and racial hierarchies that structure his relationship to his patron, a blindness that implicates the narrator in his own exploitation" (119).

As I hope to have shown in my discussion above, precisely the same implicit critique pervades *Loving Her*. Critics who accuse Shockley of unconsciously replicating class and race hierarchies while *trying* to represent a lesbian feminist utopia miss this layer of irony, allusion, and critique. By reevaluating Shockley's intentionality, we re-orient ourselves to the text and join her in her perceptions that love and sentimental belonging can coexist with and obscure racial antagonism and material belonging; that butch-femme dynamics and differences in socioeconomic class can be merely the outward trappings of a relation of master and slave; that consent cannot pertain between a white lesbian and a being whose existence is categorically conditioned by coercion and exclusion from the aspiration to normativity.

In addition to the complicated "belonging" that pertains between Renay and Terry, another major plot arc of *Loving Her* is the death of Denise. This plot arc gives us material to reconsider queer theory's approach to futurity. Lee Edelman's *No Future* asserts that the queer is discursively deployed as the representation of the worst imaginable threat to futurity. The resulting counterinvestment in the image of "the Child" is always explicitly or implicitly informed by the necessity of excluding and defending against the queer. Edelman makes two important mistakes in *No Future*. The first is to overlook the possibility of differences between categories of children that make them more or less eligible to be the referent of the discursive, synecdochic construction "the Child." By making his Child singular, Edelman deliberately mimics the way political discourse monumentalizes an ideal abstraction of Childness. Frantz Fanon, however, points out that the fetishization of the child as representative of futurity in Western culture applies only to non-black children: "A magnificent blond child—how much peace there is in that phrase, how much joy, and above all how much hope! There is no

comparison with a magnificent black child: literally, such a thing is unwonted" (189). The blond child represents both the inheritor of racial purity and the literal heir of the bourgeois family's possessions. In stressing "hope" above all, Fanon captures the way the white child is deployed to represent the futurity of the white family. The Negro child is not simply a degraded or disadvantaged version of the white child; rather, there *is no comparison*; they are incommensurable. In political ontology and in the discourse of civil society, Fanon's Negro child cannot represent futurity and inheritance the way the white child does. Similarly, in *Racial Innocence* Robin Bernstein describes the "exclusion of black youth from the category of childhood" (16).

The second (not unrelated) mistake is to dwell exclusively in the realm of discourse and representation, or in Edelman's Lacanian terms, the Symbolic. To Edelman, politics are textual; violence is exclusion or regulation within the Symbolic.[27] However, "politics," from the Greek *politikos* or citizens, from *polis*, city, does not only refer to the words and images through which political battles are waged and political (un)consciousnesses formed, but also to the structure of society and its distribution of property; to the implementation of policies and their material effects on those governed—material effects which include both immediate, spectacular violence (after all, "politics" shares its etymological root with "police") and the generations-long accumulation and distribution of wealth, poverty, education, health, employment, social ecology, and other material factors that radically condition the life chances of individuals under the

[27] Though I don't have space for an extended discussion here, it's relevant to note that this conflation of politics and textuality is not a whim but rather characterizes Edelman's thought more generally. His earlier book, *Homographesis*, (as indicated by the title) represents the ultimate textualization of political sexuality: "In the first sense, homographesis would refer to the cultural mechanism by which writing is brought into relation to the question of sexual difference in order to conceive the gay body as text, thereby effecting a far-reaching intervention in the policial regulation of social identities" (10). Therefore, it's no surprise that its blind spots include material relations and gratuitous violence.

purview of the polity (and by that I refer to both those sheltered with the polity and those who form its constitutive outside). By analyzing discourse and representation to the exclusion of these material effects, Edelman arrives at the conclusion that

> the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought. That logic compels us, to the extent that we would register as politically responsible, to submit to the framing of political debate—and, indeed, of the political field—as defined by the terms of what this book describes as reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations. (2)

By reducing "the political itself," "the political field," and "the political domain" to interchangeability with "political debate" and "political discourse," Edelman makes it easy to forget the fact that while it is nearly impossible to *articulate* an anti-reproductive-futurist, or anti-*Child* discourse, it is exceedingly possible for citizens, politicians, and their policies to *act* against the interests—indeed, toward the destruction—of certain *children*.

Politics is also a term that relies on a constitutive outside; as Aristotle foundationally describes, politics conceived as the collective effort to foster "the good life" is the realm of the citizen, not the slave. Edelman moves to position himself outside of politics: "Impossibly, against all reason, my project stakes its claim to the very space that 'politics' makes unthinkable: the space outside the framework within which politics as we know it appears and so outside the conflict of visions that share as their presupposition that the body politic must survive" (3). But he neglects that being outside the framework in which survival and futurity are valued and

encouraged by politics—what he considers impossible, against all reason, unthinkable—is the *a priori* condition of the slave. Indeed, the survival of blackness as a political category is inversely proportionate to the survival of black bodies as political subjects. If politics, as Edelman has it, is "the fantasy, precisely, of form as such, of an order, an organization, that assures the stability of our identities as subjects and the coherence of the Imaginary totalizations through which those identities appear to us in recognizable form" (7), then some really are excluded from it.

Edelman reveals his blind spot symptomatically in his polemical celebration of "the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life" (30). Here he upends Aristotle's distinction, implying that it is the citizen who is the true slave, laboring without recompense for the future of the polity in a state of (discursive) coercion. The actual slave—object of gratuitous violence, social death, and general dishonor—disappears, registering only as the vehicle of a metaphor for devaluation and degradation. Edelman is rather part of the rule than the exception, of course, in using slavery as a tool for thought in a way that validates the subject's libidinal and political investment in freedom at the expense of the erasure of the slave. I remind the reader of Stockton's description of *Giovanni's Room* as a "white man's slave narrative" for an immediate example, while Patterson proposes that this substitution is the hallmark of Western political thought:

> And so it was that freedom came into the world. Before slavery people simply could not have conceived of the thing we call freedom. Men and women in premodern, nonslaveholding societies did not, could not, value the removal of restraint as an ideal. Individuals yearned only for the security of being positively anchored in a network of power and authority. Happiness was membership; being was belonging; leadership was the ultimate demonstration of these two qualities. It is an abuse of language to refer to

> membership and belonging as a kind of freedom; freedom is not a faculty or a power to do something. […] Slaves were the first persons to find themselves in a situation where it was vital to refer to what they wanted in this way. […]
>
> Beyond the sociohistorical findings is the unsettling discovery that an ideal cherished in the West beyond all others emerged as a necessary consequence of the degradation of slavery and the effort to negate it. The first men and women to struggle for freedom, the first to think of themselves as free in the only meaningful sense of the term, were freedmen. And without slavery there would have been no freedmen. (340-342)

Despite the questionability of the overdrawn, binary contrast between premodern and slaveholding societies, the contention that freedom became prized in the presence of slavery is hard to deny. Like a natural material transformed by discourse into a natural "resource," the *concept* of freedom as a precious, desirable, limited commodity is mined from the experience of slaves and freedmen and put into circulation among subjects of civil society—becoming "an ideal cherished in the West beyond all others"—while reinscribing the divide between eligibility for freedom and condemnation to categorical enslavement as the border between civil society and its constitutive outside. By calling upon queer subjects to "resist enslavement to the future," Edelman joins this foundational tradition, circulating the ideal of freedom while occluding its origins.

In *Loving Her*, Shockley uses her fictional characters to stage a dialogue on precisely the question of queer futurity and black preclusion, or the difference between the way white children fall out of the web of safety and the *a priori* exclusion of black children from this precarious web. The characters explicitly discuss the way homosexuality, as a non-generative and

nonnormative form of sexuality, is figured as a threat to futurity when the elderly but enlightened Mrs. Stilling, neighbor to Renay and Terry, reflects, "The reason some give against [homosexuality] is that such a love is abortively barren. It cannot produce the fruits of a heterosexual relationship. Remember Stephen pondering in *The Well of Loneliness*: What could a man give her Mary that she could not—a child?" (173). Formulating a counter-discourse in which the health of the relationship itself provides the fulfillment and futurity that children do in the dominant discourse described by Mrs. Stilling, Terry responds, "Children don't necessarily have to be the only fruits of a marriage. […] I've seen childless marriages in which people are completely fulfilled. I also know of marriages which have disintegrated because of the arrival of children. Sometimes with children the love becomes divided, and there is no time for discovery or for treasuring aloneness for its own sake" (173). The metaphor "fruits of a marriage" leaves unquestioned the idea that a marriage is intended to be generative of *something*, but replaces that product with personal fulfillment rather than children. Similarly, Terry reinforces the value of futurity and generativity with the counterexample of marriages "disintegrating." By persisting rather than disintegrating, the happy (and potentially lesbian) marriage continually gives birth to itself, becoming its own futurity. Thus, Mrs. Stilling and Terry reframe homosexuality to fit within the economy of futurity and threat dictated by normative civil society.

Simultaneously, however, Renay's young daughter Denise plays the role of traditional reproductive futurity, thereby revealing that if queerness is a threat to futurity, blackness is a preemption from it. Renay brings Denise with her when she leaves Jerome for a lesbian life with Terry. Jerome kidnaps the child and kills her in a drunken car crash. The endangerment and death of Denise mobilize speculation on normativity, futurity, and exclusion among the characters. For example, Jerome threatens to use Renay's sexuality against her in their custody

battle, saying, “The shitting-ass nerve of you, bringing my daughter up around bulldikers” (128). Similarly, after Denise’s death, Renay asks, “Do you think God’s punishing us for this? The way we feel about each other? It’s supposed to be unnatural, isn’t it? Isn’t that what people and books and doctors say?” (177). In both examples, the characters demonstrate the discursive figuration of queer as threat to futurity and the subsequent exclusion of the queer from the fold of normativity theorized by Edelman. But, just as in the earlier case of critics overlooking the racial antagonism that subtends Renay and Terry’s relationship, it would be a mistake to miss the novel’s irony on this topic—while both Jerome and Renay focus on the queer as threat to futurity, it is Jerome, the stereotypical “absent” black father, who turns out to be the all-too-present danger, perpetuating Renay’s inherited preemption from the ability to generate futurity by killing their child. The difference between threat and preemption in *Loving Her* parallels the difference between contingent and *a priori* exclusion from civil society I have developed in Chapter Two; it also demonstrates the role of Renay’s racial inheritance in preempting the individual inheritances that attend reproductive futurity for members of civil society.

Hortense Spillers has written with acuity on the topic of the absent father as both a representational construct and a racial inheritance from slavery that precludes the individual, kinship-based inheritances of reproductive futurity. In both “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” and “‘The Permanent Obliquity of an In(pha)llibly Straight’: In the Time of the Daughters and the Fathers,” she defines the father-child relationship on two fronts, at once the material, violent effect of slavery and also the malicious representation of the dominant culture:

> Among African-Americans in the midst of violent historic intervention that, for all intents and purposes, has banished the father, if not in fact murdered him, the father’s law

> embodies still the guilt that hovers: ones feels called on to explain, make excuses, for his "absence." But the African-American-Father-Gone is the partial invention of sociologists, as the African-American female-as-daughter is consumed in their tale of the "Black Matriarchate." (230)

The absent father is the result of "violent historic intervention" and at the same time is "the partial invention of sociologists." The representation is not false, though it is malicious; it is part of a feedback loop in which the inventions of sociologists become the material banishment and murder of the father, and vice versa. Just as the father has been made absent, the daughter has been labeled the "Black Matriarchate," or too-present. Therefore, "We attempt to undo this misnaming in order to reclaim the relationship between fathers and daughters within this social matrix for a quite different structure of cultural fictions. For daughters and fathers manifest here the very same *rhetorical* symptoms of absence and denial, to embody the double and contrastive agencies of a *prescribed* internecine degradation" (204, original emphasis).

In the chapter of *On Black Men* titled "Father Stories," David Marriott elaborates on this racial inheritance. Citing John Edgar Wideman's memoir of being a son and father, Marriott writes, "[W]hat *Fatheralong* uncovers, or, more accurately, symptomatically reveals, is how racism is passed on from father to son, like an unwitting curse: a bitterness buried yet operative between them, inhabiting the son (though he doesn't know it), a faultline of self and identity. Hence the mark that the black father leaves, a mark that is both ineffaceable and irremediable" (96). The mark is both the son's literal flesh color and the politico-ontological meanings attached to it, just as "racism" is both the material violence of anti-blackness and its corresponding representational systems. Very similarly, Spillers writes of the scars left by torture of slaves, "These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh

whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color. We might well ask if this phenomenon of marking and branding actually 'transfers' from one generation to another, finding its various *symbolic substitutions* in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments?" (207, original emphasis). Marriott continues:

> Typed, in the wider culture, as the cause of, and cure for, black men's 'failure', his father's apparently lost, and untellable, life is the story that the son must find and narrate if he is to begin to understand how, and why, blackness has come to represent an inheritable fault. Only by retelling father stories, Wideman suggests, can Afro-American men reestablish authentic worlds of communication, reopen lost channels of wisdom and counsel, intimacy and love. That's the redemptive privilege in finding, and listening to—but where? and how?—the paternal voices which have been mediated and murdered, usurped and withheld, by a culture, and a nation, intent on driving home to black men the inadequacy of black fathers: their weakness, their absence, their brutality, their death. (96)

According to Marriott, the black father is a sort of double negative: he is negated both by the representation of the black father as destructively absent (Marriott, like Spillers, cites the Moynihan Report as shorthand for this dominant discourse) *and* by his own material, violent murder, usurpation, death. Marriott asks, "But how do you tell the father's story when he is anonymous, absent, undetermined?" (97). In other words, how do you begin to repair the damage done by the representation of absence, when the actual *fact* of absence persists? It is not simply a question of producing better "father stories" that would set the record straight and prove the presence of the black father; rather, we must recognize that representation is but *one* arm of the anti-blackness that negates black fathers, and the best use of a father story is to register and

redirect that negation. Marriott concludes, "This enigma is, no doubt, part of the black father's truth and story: father stories can only be avowed and told in so far as they go beyond narrative fulfillment, come down on the cusp between presence and absence" (97).

Is *Loving Her* such a father story? No; it does not "reestablish authentic worlds of communication, reopen lost channels of wisdom and counsel, intimacy and love" (Marriott 96). Instead, it plants a negrophobic aversion to the black father in its main characters and in its narrative arc. The novel does not perform the labor Spillers suggests of "dis-cover[ing]" the father (Spillers 206). Yes, in that it explores the absent father in order to "understand how, and why, blackness has come to represent an inheritable fault" (Marriott 96). Yes, in that it "come[s] down on the cusp between presence and absence" (97).

From the first page of the novel, Jerome's most present characteristic is his absence: "She moved her foot tentatively across the bed to assure herself that he wasn't there. No, he really wasn't there. The realization drowned out the rain and caused new life to flow within her. She opened her eyes in relief. He was gone" (1). The novel begins on the morning that Renay leaves Jerome and goes to stay with Terry, and tells Renay's past through flashbacks. The narrative itself therefore commences at the moment that "new life […flows] within her"; Jerome's absence occasions both Renay's return to life and the genesis of the text. In flashbacks, however, we learn that Jerome, a beauty products salesman, has also been absent in the past, to different effect: "The bills were mounting and Jerome Lee had been away for a month without a word. With Denise in tow, she had trudged wearily across town to the hair-frying parlors, asking if anyone had seen him. Some of the beauticians had looked at her blankly, others scornfully, over the smoking hot combs, relaxers, dryers, gossip and their patrons' standing hair. All had shaken

their heads negatively" (12). Before Terry's intervention into Renay's life, the only thing worse than Jerome's presence is his absence, which causes the bills to pile up, "the landlord [to become] more insistent, the refrigerator more empty and she terribly desperate" (13).

Moreover, overbearing traces of his presence mark both of these absences. The morning Renay wakes up and leaves the absent Jerome, she reflects on Denise's resemblance to him; she encounters an empty whiskey bottle he has left on her dresser, a half-empty bottle on the kitchen sink, and a full one hidden near the bathroom; and she wears the bruise he has left on her face: "The back of a large black hand striking out in angry rebuttal against her and all the other black women before and after her" (2). And while Renay scours the beauty parlors of Illinois, finding him nowhere, at the same time, "He could have been anywhere. He could even be in the back of one of the shops, looking out at her through the curtains while drinking with the owner" (13). Being "anywhere", which is the same as being nowhere as far as the mounting bills and empty fridge are concerned, instantly transforms into the possibility of being too close, too present. Jerome is a walking embodiment of negation and violence, equally destructive in presence or absence.

The pattern established in these first two absences is writ large in the rest of the novel's plot of fatherhood and futurity. On the rare occasions he is home in flashbacks, the effect of his habitual absence is registered in Denise's behavior: "Denise sat quietly at the table as she had learned to do when her father came home. […] 'You been a good girl while I been gone?' The question was routine, the words apparently the only ones he knew to communicate with her. Denise nodded her head, staring empty-eyed at this stranger who was her father" (24). Shortly thereafter, Renay reflects, "The situation was becoming unbearable. Now, sometimes, Denise was frightened at the spectacle that was her Daddy. More than once she had cried out in her

sleep—even when he wasn't there" (25). Waking, Denise makes herself as absent as possible in her father's presence, sitting quietly, the emptiness of her eyes mirroring the vacuum of communication and filiation between them, manifesting the neglect of his frequent absence even in his presence. Sleeping, she breaks her silence and cries out, tortured by the specter/spectacle of his presence despite his actual absence.

In the inverse of the way Renay seeks but cannot find him in her flashbacks, she tries to escape his presence but cannot elude him in the present. As soon as she stops looking for him, he comes looking for her, the only persistent truth being the fact that she cannot obtain whichever object, his presence or his absence, she desires at the moment. He confronts her friend Fran at her apartment and interrogates her about her whereabouts; upon hearing Fran's account, Renay thinks, "Why should he look for her? He had never looked before. But she hadn't left him before either. A bird out of the cage—the cat ready to pounce?" (31). Denise briefly thrives in his absence, as Terry takes over the fatherly responsibilities: "Denise adored Terry, who read to her every night and brought her surprises and took her for drives while Renay cooked dinner" (39). But in this case his absence, so harmful to Denise before, is all too brief; Jerome, "halfway hidden in the shadows" (41), stakes out Renay at the club where she works and announces, "I want my kid back[. …] I love her" (45). Renay dismisses his claim to love Denise with evidence of his lack of fatherly attention to her, but he stakes her out again, this time following Denise home from school to Terry's house, where he spies on Denise from a park bench, lurks in the building's hallway, and looks at the names on the mailboxes—these latter actions providing part of the basis for the manager asking Terry and Renay to vacate the building (60). He stalks Renay at the club again, this time following her and Terry as they drive home, running them off the road and approaching their car: "He loomed grotesque and menacing before them" (109). They escape

him that night, but he tracks them to their new home once they move to Willow Wood, shows up in the middle of the night, and beats Renay almost to death: "Maybe it wasn't he—an apparition—or maybe her imagination was so strong that it was making her see things that weren't really true. But when he spoke to her, it was clear that Jerome Lee was before her—a nightmare in reality" (127).

Finally, inevitably, Jerome's present violence and absent fatherliness cause Denise's death. He finds out that Denise is staying with Renay's mother in Kentucky and follows her there. He takes her on a drive which ends in a drunken car crash in which Denise dies and he is mildly injured. Renay returns to Willow Wood after the funeral, but she is inconsolable; she laments, "Everything's wrong again. I've lost my little girl. A sweet, intelligent little girl with bright eyes and dimples. She had a world of exciting days before her—the wonder of growing up, the discovery of love—each day a new jewel within itself. Why—why?" (177). The phrase "world of days" conflates space and time, nostalgically imbuing Denise with a capacity for existence in the world that she never had; Renay's focus on her lost future confirms Edelman's description of the ever-deferred future in creating the value of the Child. But it is not Renay's queerness that endangers Denise (although Renay herself speculates so, as described above), but rather Jerome's blackness that guarantees her death. Renay speculates that Jerome kills Denise on purpose to get revenge against her, and obsessively imagines the scene of the crash with "that *black* man" (177, original emphasis) in the driver's seat: "I wonder what he said while they were riding? 'I'm going to kill you, Denise, to get back at your damn bitch of a mother.' He could say things like that, you know. Or, 'Look at the great big tree, Denise. We're going to crash!'" (178). Renay vividly fantasizes about the violent destruction of black futurity by the black father: "She screamed, a subdued eerie wail that made Terry know she had been in the car and seen the tree

and felt the crash" (178). The characters' Edelmanian preoccupation with queerness as a threat to futurity allows the deadly effect of Jerome's blackness—inevitable, intentional as it seems afterward—to blindside them. After the conversation described earlier in which Terry frets over Renay possibly having to harden herself to join her lesbian world, Terry adds, "I don't want anything to happen to you—because of me," and Renay responds, "If it does, […] I wouldn't want it to happen because of anyone else" (112). And this is the crux of the matter—Renay desires to be punished for her lesbian desires, but instead she is preempted from generating reproductive futurity by her blackness, which allegorically pursues her in the form of Jerome.

Jerome is more than an individual character; allegorically, he represents the conflation of blackness and deathliness caused by generations of absent fathers, lack of reproductive futurity, and the impossibility of normative inheritance. He is described in heavy-handed negrophobic language as a "wild black savage" (139), "a hulking brown shadow, […] a black giant whose Afro bush was too long and wildly matted" (127). Especially in these moments of almost shocking negrophobia, it is important not to read Jerome as a representation of an individual black man, but rather as the allegorical embodiment of the confluence of material and representational violence identified by Spillers. At the same time that his physical presence is overbearing, he is also described as emptiness and nonexistence. Renay says, "I have no feeling for him. There never was anything there except emptiness" (111). Terry thinks of him as "this nonentity who had given Renay what she could not give—a name and a child" (108), but in doing so neglects the ways that being a "nonentity" preempts him from making that name and child stick. As Sharon Patricia Holland writes, "[T]he (white) culture's dependence on the nonhuman status of its black subjects was never measured by the ability of whites to produce a 'social heritage'; instead it rested on the status of the black as a nonentity" (15). Here, Holland

agrees with Patterson's claim that slaves cannot produce a legitimate, recognized social heritage, but complicates the inverse implication that therefore *all* white subjects can and do. Queer white subjects like Terry (and Baldwin's David, and Edelman's queers) have the capacity to remain white *without* producing a social heritage or reproductive futurity, as long as they have the "yardstick" (Holland 16) of the nonentity of blackness against which to measure themselves. Terry displays precisely this use of blackness-as-yardstick when she continues her thought, "But she had given her that which he was unable to give—love" (108). As long as Renay remains with him, Jerome's nonentity is contagious; with him, "She managed to work, take care of Denise, and live, but without really feeling alive. All the days and nights were of a grave sameness, and there were moments when she wondered if she existed at all" (18). She thinks of herself as "a drowning, a wish unfulfilled, a death" (26). Jerome describes having sex with her as "like screwing a motherfucking corpse!" (43). In contrast, Terry gives her life; "A new life had begun for her—a new existence" (85). Renee, after all, means "reborn."

Shockley not only allegorizes the absent black father in Jerome, but also encodes his absence as an inevitable inheritance from the previous generation. Jerome's too-present absence as a father is a repetition of the absence of his own father, who "had walked out on the family long ago, disappearing into the nameless jungle of other withdrawing black fathers" (17). The fate of Renay's father is even more telling; despite good intentions, he is killed "in a freak tractor accident while working on a farm when [she] was a little girl" (37). What is diegetically a "freak accident" is allegorically necessary and inevitable.

In our interpretation of Jerome as the absent father and too-present source of death, we once again arrive at the question of intentionality. If we assume, as other critics invariably have, that Shockley unconsciously allows these negrophobic constructs to infiltrate and taint her

ostensibly utopic, colorblind narrative, then she is in error, and the solution is to produce better, purer representations of black lesbians. But if we assume, as I do, that Shockley deliberately plants the seeds of anti-blackness not only in her white lesbian character but even in the character who seeks to "lose her identity in Terry's world," the black lesbian who desires to desire, then we can see the critique of racial antagonisms in the present that underlies her vision of the raceless lesbian utopia of the future. We see that she raises Edelman's questions about the relationship between queerness, reproductive futurity, and death, only to insist that if queerness is a threat to futurity, blackness is a preemption from it.

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