City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

CUNY Graduate Center

1996

Tearing the Goat's Flesh: Homosexuality, Abjection, and the Production of a Late Twentieth-Century Black Masculinity

Robert Reid-Pharr
CUNY Graduate Center

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_pubs/295

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

TEARING THE GOAT'S FLESH: HOMOSEXUALITY, ABJECTION AND THE PRODUCTION OF A LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY BLACK MASCULINITY

ROBERT F. REID-PHARR

Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.
Exodus 23:19

Chivo que rompe tambor con su pellejo paga.
Abakua proverb.

Diana Fuss has argued in a recent discussion of contemporary gay and lesbian theory that the figure of what we might call the undead homosexual, the homosexual who continually reappears, even and especially in the face of the most grisly violence and degradation, is absolutely necessary to the production of positive heterosexual identity, at least heterosexual identity produced within bourgeois-dominated economies of desire that, as Eve Sedgwick demonstrates, deploy homophobia to check slippage between (male) homosociality and homosexuality.¹ The inside/out binarism, then, the distinction between normality and chaos, is maintained precisely through the mediation of the sexually liminal character, that is to say, the homosexual. Fuss writes:

Those inhabiting, the inside . . . can only comprehend the outside through incorporation of a negative image. This process of negative interiorization involves turning homosexuality inside out, exposing not the homosexual's abjected insides but the homosexual as the abject, as the contaminated and expurgated insides of the heterosexual subject.²

Fuss's point is well taken. For she suggests not simply that the innate pathology of the homosexual must be revealed in order to produce the

heterosexual community, but also that the homosexual works as the vehicle by which hetero-pathology itself might be negotiated; that is, the homosexual as "the contaminated and expurgated insides of the heterosexual subject."

In relating this insight to the production of African-American masculinity, I would argue that the pathology that the homosexual must negotiate is precisely the specter of Black boundarylessness, the idea that there is no normal Blackness to which the Black subject, American, or otherwise, might refer. Following the work of René Girard, especially his 1986 study of the place of violence, real and imagined, in the production of communal identity, *The Scapegoat*,³ I will suggest that homosexuality operates mimetically in the texts that I examine, standing itself as the sign of a prior violence, the violence of boundarylessness, or cultural eclipse—to borrow Girard's language—that has been continually visited upon the African-American community during its long sojourn in the new world. Indeed Orlando Patterson, Henry Louis Gates, and Paul Gilroy, among others, have argued that the Black has been conceptualized in modern (slave) culture as an inchoate, irrational non-subject, as the chaos that both defines and threatens the borders of logic, individuality, and basic subjectivity.⁴ In that schema, all Blacks become interchangeable, creating among the population a sort of continual restlessness, a terror. Girard writes:

The terror inspired in people by the eclipse of culture and the universal confusion of popular uprisings are signs of a community that is literally undifferentiated, deprived of all that distinguishes one person from another in time and space. As a consequence all are equally disordered in the same place and at the same time.⁵

Though Girard's discussion here precedes from a consideration of societies suddenly thrown into confusion: plague-ridden medieval Europe, revolutionary France, his work suggests that all terror, all confusion, works to undifferentiate the subjects of the (newly) chaotic society such that the members of the society come to stand in for one another in their common experience of vertigo. The scapegoat, then, would be the figure who reproduces this undifferentiation, this chaos, this boundarylessness. The violence directed against the goat would mitigate against the prior violence, the erosion of borders that has beset the entire community.

I would add to this only that anti-homosexual violence operates in the production of Black masculinity on two levels. First, as I have argued already, the strike against the homosexual acts as a seemingly direct confrontation with the presumption of Black boundarylessness, or we might say the assumption of Black subhumanity and Black irrationality that has its roots deep in the history of slavery and the concomitant will to produce Africans as "Other." To strike the homosexual, the scapegoat, the sign of chaos and crisis, is to return

the community to normality, to create boundaries around Blackness, rights that indeed white men are obliged to recognize.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, this violence allows for a reconnection to the very figure of boundarylessness that the assailant is presumably attempting to escape. As a consequence, Black subjects are able to transcend, if only for a moment, the very strictures of normality and rationality that have been defined in contradistinction to a necessarily amorphous Blackness. My point here is to argue for reconsideration of the process of abjection, a process referenced by Diana Fuss and developed most fruitfully by Julia Kristeva, in the *dearticulation* of meaning and identity.⁶ Rather, I would suggest that abjection is characterized by an excess of meaning. As a consequence, we might use the figure of the abject to access “slips” in the ideological structures of modernity, if not a complete reworking of the entire process. To put it bluntly, we must empty our consciousness of that which is contradictory and ambiguous and most especially that which disallows our differentiation. Still we seem not to be able to complete this process. We become uncomfortable with “realness” at precisely those moments when it appears to be most firmly established. Even as the profligate subject is destroyed, we retain “him” within the national consciousness, always on the brink of renewal, lest we find ourselves entrapped within a logic of subjectivity from which the Black is excluded already.

I

The formal and rhetorical strategies that link Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*, and Piri Thomas’s *Down These Mean Streets* are not immediately apparent. Cleaver and Thomas’s texts are “autobiographical” and analytical while Baldwin’s is fictional. Cleaver documents what has become one of the most recognizable, one might even say trite, markers of Black masculinity, incarceration, while both Thomas and Baldwin attempt to push against the confines of American Blackness altogether. Thomas charts the difficulty that a young, dark-skinned Puerto Rican encounters as he tries to make sense of an American racial economy that creates him as “Black” while Baldwin opts to step outside of the confines of American race literature altogether, producing a novel in which there are no Black characters, but, as I will argue below, in which race is one of the central signifiers.

At the same time, there is the pressing question of how we are to read Baldwin’s “gay” novel in relation to the virulent homophobia of Eldridge Cleaver, a homophobia that reaches its apex at precisely those moments when it is directed specifically at Baldwin and his work, particularly *Another Country*. A similar question surrounds the work of Piri Thomas whose anti-gay sentiment is just as apparent, if somewhat less virulent, than Cleaver’s. One might argue, in fact, that Cleaver, Thomas and Baldwin belong to distinct literary camps such that any attempt to read the three together can proceed only

by pointing out the variety of the diametric oppositions. Still, as Paul Gilroy has suggested in a discussion of John Singleton's *Boys in the Hood* and Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied*, even as the Black neo-masculinist heterosexual attempts to distance himself from homosexuality he draws attention to the "similarities and convergences in the way that love between men is the common factor."⁷ It follows that the key to understanding the depth of Thomas and Cleaver's homophobia lies precisely in the fact that the universe that both represent in their literature is so consistently and insistently masculine and homosocial.

Much has been made of Cleaver's vicious and repeated attacks on women and gay men. In almost every treatment of this issue, however, Cleaver's misogyny and homophobia have been chalked up to his male privilege and antiquated notions of what constitutes properly Black gender and sexual relations. To date no one has examined seriously Cleaver's tragicomic struggle to construct a Black heterosexuality, to finally rid the Black consciousness of the dual specters of effeminacy and interracial homoeroticism. One might argue, in fact, that Cleaver's woman hating and fag bashing were, for all his bravado, failed attempts to assert himself and the Black community as "straight."

Soul on Ice is in large part an explication of the difficulties of Black subjectification within the highly homosocial, homosexual prison. Women, though present, operate only as the means by which social relations between men are communicated. Early in the text Cleaver confesses to having been a racially motivated rapist, perfecting his craft on the bodies of Black women before he "crossed the tracks" to seek out his "white prey."⁸ Clearly the abuse of the Black female body acts as a means to an end, a type of cultural production in which Cleaver's manhood, his sense of self-worth, is established and articulated. I would be wrong, however, to suggest that Cleaver's ultimate goal is to possess and abuse white female bodies. Again women act only as conduits by which social relations, relations that take place exclusively between men, are represented. Cleaver may indeed be raping Black and white women, but it is white men whom he intends to hurt.

Rape was an insurrectionary act. It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man's law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women—and this point, I believe, was the most satisfying to me because I was very resentful over the historical fact of how the white man has used the black woman. I felt I was getting revenge.⁹

The peculiarity of Cleaver's twisted logic rests not so much in the fact that he saw sexual violence as an insurrectionary tool. On the contrary, the rape of women, is used regularly to terrorize and subdue one's "enemies." The difficulty in Cleaver's logic rests in the fact that he raped both white *and* Black

women. Was he, I must wonder, seeking revenge on the white man when he violated poor, Black female residents of his quintessentially Black ghettos?

This question is not simply rhetorical. Cleaver himself argues that there is a tendency within some segments of the Black community to understand the Black woman as having collaborated, particularly through the vehicle of sex, with the white master. Indeed Angela Davis attempts to contextualize this sentiment in her seminal essay, "Reflections on The Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves."¹⁰ Raping the Black woman could be interpreted, then, as an attack on the white man's stooge. The Black woman becomes the means of telegraphing a message of rage and resistance to the white male oppressor, a figure Cleaver recodifies as the Omnipotent Administrator.

It becomes clear that the ultimate target of Cleaver's sexual attacks is always the white man. Both white and Black women act as pawns in an erotic conversation between Cleaver and his white male counterparts. This fact is emblematically represented in an exchange between Cleaver and a white prison guard who enters Cleaver's cell, rips a picture of a voluptuous white woman from the wall, tears it to bits, and then leaves the pieces floating in the toilet for Cleaver to find upon his return. The guard later tells Cleaver that he will allow him to keep pictures of Black women, but not whites.

The clue to how deeply homoerotic the exchange between Cleaver and the guard actually is lies in Cleaver's description of his initial reaction. He writes, "I was genuinely beside myself with anger: almost every cell, excepting those of the homosexuals, had a pin-up girl on the wall and the guards didn't bother them."¹¹ Cleaver's pin-up girl acts as not only a sign of interracial desire, but also a marker of his heterosexuality. This fact, which seems easy enough to understand, actually represents a deep contradiction within Cleaver's demonstration of the Black male heterosexual self. It points directly to the disjunction between the reality of the interracial homoerotic, *homosexual* environment, the prison, in which Cleaver actually lived and wrote and the fantasy of Black heterosexuality that he constructs in his narrative.

Indeed Cleaver's one rather ethereal representation of heterosexual love seems artificial and contrived, coming as it does from the pen of an admitted serial rapist and committed homophobe. He spends some time in *Soul on Ice* describing the exchange of "love" letters between his lawyer, Beverly Axelrod, and himself. Strangely enough, there is little of Cleaver, the rapist, in these works. His love seemingly transcends the corporeal. By turns he describes Axelrod as a rebel and a revolutionary, a person of great intelligence, compassion, and humanity, a valiant defender of "civil rights demonstrators, sit-inners, and the Free Speech students." And just at the moment when he has produced her as bodiless, transcendent saint he interjects,

I suppose that I should be honest, and before going any further, admit that my lawyer is a woman . . . a very excellent, unusual, and beautiful

woman. I know that she believes that I do not really love her and that I am confusing a combination of lust and gratitude for love. Lust and gratitude I feel abundantly, but I also love this woman.¹²

I am less concerned with pointing out the obvious homoerotic reference than with voicing how strikingly measured and cerebral his relationship with Beverly Axelrod actually was. Indeed lust and gratitude are distinct from "Love," which is presumably a type of transcendent, *transsexual* appreciation for the intrinsic worth of the individual.

Yet Cleaver's description of his non-corporeal, non-funky love for Beverly Axelrod can only redouble upon itself. It directly challenges the claim that Cleaver's work is a product of the stark reality he has experienced. Cleaver has, much like the white man, the Omnipotent Administrator he so despises, excised his own penis, his lust, his physical self from the conversation.

The Omnipotent Administrator, having repudiated and abdicated his body, his masculine component which he has projected onto the men beneath him, cannot present his woman, the Ultrafeminine, with an image of masculinity capable of penetrating into the psychic depths where the treasure of her orgasm is buried.¹³

Still even as Cleaver decries the bodilessness of the Omnipotent Administrator his love for Beverly Axelrod is no more physical than is the white man's for the ultrafeminine. Beverly Axelrod is unlike the victims of Cleaver's rapes in that she is all intellect and no body. The "sexual" passion between the two is even more rarefied than that of the Omnipotent Administrator and the Ultrafeminine because there is never even the promise of physical contact, raw sex, but only endless *literary* representations of their desire. Beverly Axelrod should be understood, then, as a fiction, or rather as the site of yet another fictional exchange. In this manner the idea of heterosexual normality becomes a sort of caricature of itself. The body gives way to the intellect, lust to love.

"Love" was for Cleaver always the terrain of conceptual struggle. Indeed "love" becomes in *Soul on Ice* the very site at which normality is constructed in contradistinction to the sense of boundary crisis that mitigates against the production of a stable Black masculinity. Perhaps the most telling moment, in this regard, is Cleaver's confrontation with his white intellectual mentor, Chris Lovdjeeff, a prison teacher and a man whom Cleaver describes as "The Christ." Lovdjeeff introduces Cleaver to what the great novelists and playwrights had said of love. He reads poetry on the subject and plays his students tapes of Ashley Montagu then instructs them to write responsive essays. Cleaver writes that he cannot love whites, quoting Malcolm X as evidence:

How can I love the man who raped my mother, killed my father, enslaved my ancestors, dropped atomic bombs on Japan, killed off the Indians and keeps me cooped up in the slums? I'd rather be tied up in a sack and tossed into the Harlem River first.¹⁴

Lovdjieff responds in a fit of tears to what he takes to be a personal attack. Cleaver remarks, "Jesus wept" then leaves. Soon thereafter the San Quentin officials begin to curtail Lovdjieff's access to the prisoners, finally barring him from entry altogether.

The ideological work that the reenactment of this oedipal ritual accomplishes is both to detach Cleaver and his narrative from the deeply homoerotic relationship he maintains with Lovdjieff and to clear the way for a purely Black masculinity. It is important to remember here that the country was in the midst of rather striking changes in the manner in which the official "reality" of both race and sexuality were articulated. In 1949, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) launched a study to identify means by which racism might be eradicated. The result of these efforts was a document, written by the same Ashley Montagu whose words Lovdjieff attempted to use as a bridge between his young protégé and himself.

Montagu, who began life as Israel Ehrenberg in London's east end, was trained as an anthropologist first at the University of London's University College and eventually at Columbia where he received his graduate education under no less a light than Franz Boas.¹⁵ By the time he wrote UNESCO's statement on race, he already had published widely in the field, developing a critical apparatus that not only called for a markedly relativistic understanding of "racial attributes," but that altogether called into question the efficacy of maintaining race as an analytical category.

For all practical social purposes, race is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth. . . . Biological differences between ethnic groups should be disregarded from the standpoint of social acceptance and social action. The unity of mankind is the main thing.¹⁶

I would suggest again that when Cleaver severs his ties with Lovdjieff he is helping to reestablish an ontological economy that would take racial difference as primary. The resolution of the crisis represented by their relationship leads to the renormalization of received racial thinking.

At the same time it is important to point out that the post-World War II period witnessed an incredible bifurcation in the means by which sexual desire was articulated and actualized. The typical narratives of the post-war sexual ethos would have it that Americans rushed into a sort of suffocating domesticity, erecting, in the process, an image of the nuclear family that would maintain a stranglehold on the nation's consciousness for at least two decades. There was also, however, a huge increase in the visibility of homosexual communities, particularly in the nation's cities, the same locations that were opening themselves more and more to Black immigrants.¹⁷ Indeed the most prominent chroniclers of the Black urban male experience, including not only Cleaver, Baldwin and Thomas, but Claude Brown, Malcolm X, and Amiri Baraka all reference the increased visibility of the urban homosexual. What

I would argue, then, is that the homosexual, and in particular the racially marked homosexual, the Black homosexual, represented for the authors I am examining the very sign of deep crisis, a crisis of identity and community that threw into confusion, if only temporarily, the boundaries of (Black) normality.

II

Piri Thomas's narrative, *Down These Mean Streets*, proceeds in much the same manner as Cleaver's. Like his Anglo contemporary, Thomas gains his sense of manhood from within the confines of racist urban America. Moreover, like Cleaver, and indeed like a variety of late twentieth-century Black male "autobiographers," most notably Malcolm X, his loss of freedom opens the path by which he *gains* his "freedom." Thomas uses the experience of prison to resurrect that part of himself that presumably has been squelched by the realities of racism and poverty, affecting in the process a *counterscripting* of the antebellum slave narratives. It is as if the literal loss of control over the self returns the narrators to the primal scene of Black subjectification, the moment when the Black, particularly the Black man, enmeshed within a system defined by the policing of Black bodies, turns for "escape" to the life of the mind, much as Douglass turns to literature and literacy in his struggle to construct himself as "free." The focus becomes, then, the immense effort necessary to maintain one's humanity or one's subjectivity, in the face of intense pressures to suppress or deny them. I would like to suggest, however, that unlike the antebellum slave narratives, in which the Black male slave risks being brutalized viciously, or worse yet having his familial and conjugal prerogatives trampled upon by licentious white men, the twentieth-century Black male narrators are in danger of being *homosexualized*. I have discussed this phenomenon in the work of Cleaver already. I would add here that Thomas's understanding of himself is altogether mediated by his relationships with men. His adoration for his father gives way to his loyalty to the gang and then finally to his respect for the prison ethos. Throughout, the homosexual acts as the emblem of the border between the inside and the out. Thomas deploys the figure of the homosexual at precisely those moments when the complex ambiguity of his "standing" within his various communities is most apparent, that is to say, those moments when he cannot avoid a declaration of his status as either The Insider or The Out.

The great difficulty of maintaining the distinction between the homosexual and the homosocial is made explicit from almost the beginning of Thomas's narrative. The young man begins to develop as an adult, as a subject constructed by—but nevertheless greater than—the various identities he inhabits, at precisely that moment when he proves that he has heart, *corazon*, and is accepted into an all-male Puerto Rican gang. The test of his spirit, the challenge that he must accept if he is to be integrated fully into the gang's

social life, is a fist fight, a strikingly physical struggle of wills between Thomas and the gang's leader, Waneko.

He had *corazon*. He came on me. *Let him draw first blood*, I thought, *it's his block*. Smish, my nose began to bleed. His boys cheered, his heart cheered, his turf cheered. "Waste this chump," somebody shouted.

Okay, baby, now it's my turn. He swung. I grabbed innocently, and forehead smashed into his nose. His eyes crossed. His fingernails went for my eye and landed in my mouth—crunch, I bit hard. I punched him in the mouth as he pulled away from me, and he slammed his foot into my chest.¹⁸

By standing his own in this fight Thomas not only gains acceptance into the gang, but initiates a relationship with Waneko that lasts over many years. This fact is not, however, so terribly remarkable. The idea that violence often helps to strengthen the bonds between men is hardly new or surprising. Still I would argue that the strikingly physical nature of the contest between Thomas and Waneko ought to alert us to the multiple levels on which this interchange resonates. Thomas allows Waneko to draw first blood out of deference to his position in the neighborhood and the gang. The abuse that the two young men mete out to one another in the course of their fight should not be understood, then, simply as a sign of masculine aggression. Thomas is not allowed into the gang solely because he is good with his fists. Instead the emphasis is on that elusive entity, heart, that place of deep feeling and masculine determination, to which the young Puerto Ricans gain access through ritualized violence. One might argue, then, that the fight between Thomas and Waneko is at once an act of aggression *and* an act of love.

I am supported in this claim by the fact that the gang members expend so much energy denying homoerotic feeling. This is even while all of them, including Thomas, seek out and willingly engage in (homo)sex. It is telling that only a few pages after the fight scene the young men decide to stretch themselves to the limits of their masculinity by visiting the apartment of a trio of stereotypically effeminate gay men. Indeed their interaction with the three homosexuals is itself designed to reflect their own hypermasculinity. They assure themselves, "Motherfuckers, who's a punk? Nobody, man," as they "jumped off the stoop and, grinning, shuffled towards the faggots' building" (p. 55).

The episode in the gay men's apartment is from the very outset overdetermined by the intense ambiguity that suffuses the extremely homosocial world of the gangs. The homosexuals, the *maricones*, stand in for the constant danger that the macho young men, with their relentless emphasis on masculinity and the male body, will stumble themselves, inadvertently, or not so inadvertently, across the line that separates the homosexual from the homosocial.

I had heard that some of them fags had bigger joints than the guy that was screwing. *Oh shit, I ain't gonna screw no motherfuckin' fag. Agh—I'm not gonna get shit all over my peter, not for all the fuckin' coins in the world.* (P. 55)

The gay man refuses, in this passage, to conform to the boys' stereotypes. His joint, his penis, the marker of his worth within the logic of patriarchy, is larger than the guy doing the screwing, the real man who stands in for Thomas and his comrades. Even more striking is the fact that Thomas's fear, the fear that he will have sex with a homosexual (thereby, compromising his own masculinity), the fear against which he must assure himself constantly, turns upon the idea that he will get feces all over his penis. This aversion to feces points directly to the immense ambiguity, the boundary crisis, that the homosexual represents. Instead of Thomas's pulling blood from the gay body, much as he regularly pulls blood from the bodies of his fellow gang members and presumably also from the bodies of recently deflowered (female) virgins, he takes only feces from the homosexual, feces that acts as evidence of the non-productive, perverse nature of the (homo)sexual act.

Let me make it perfectly clear that what I am interested in here is not the cataloging of homosexual content in the work of late twentieth-century Black male autobiographers, but instead a reading of homosexuality that pays attention to the way in which the homosexual stands in for the fear of crisis and chaos, or rather, the fear of slipping to the outside, that pervades the work of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century Black writers. As the young "heterosexual" Puerto Rican men enter the apartment of the young "homosexual" Puerto Rican men it becomes difficult, even in the face of the "straight" men's many protestations, to maintain a distinction between the two. Indeed it becomes nearly impossible to continue the inside/out binarism.

The rather lengthy group sex scene that Thomas describes takes on a strikingly surreal aspect. The air that they breathe is heavy with the smell of marijuana smoke, thereby pushing *all* the young men beyond their *normal* limits, creating the space of the gay men's apartment as a type of liminal terrain; we might even say a *no-man's* land. Moreover, the effect is not simply that the *normality* of their erotic lives is jettisoned, but also that the sexual act becomes transposed onto a variety of experiences and sites.

I opened my eye a little. I saw a hand, and between its fingers was a stick of pot. I didn't look up at the face. I just plucked the stick from the fingers. I heard the feminine voice saying, 'You gonna like thees pot. Eet's good stuff.'

I felt its size. It was a king-sized bomber. I put it to my lips and began to hiss my reserve away. It was going, going, going. I was gonna get a gone high. I inhaled. I held my nose, stopped up my mouth. I was gonna get a gone high . . . a gone high . . . a gone high . . . and then the stick was gone, burnt to a little bit of a roach. (P. 58)

Though this passage is taken from a scene that is heavily determined by the notion of profligate sex and sexuality there is apparently no sexual activity at all. No penis, vagina, breasts or buttocks are here to alert the reader that what we are experiencing is a type of *sexual* intercourse. There is, moreover, neither blood, nor feces to act as evidence of the all-important penetration. I would argue, however, that the very fact that this passage lacks the normal markers of sexual activity is precisely what produces it as a representation of profligacy. Here the erotic content is transferred from the sexual organs to the lips, a key site of homoerotic, homosexual pleasure. As the pot stick enters Thomas's lips, chipping away at his reserve until he is altogether gone, or we might say, spent, sexuality is severed from its association with the genitals and thus with heterosexual reproduction.

Moreover, Thomas accepts neither the passive nor active role. Though he receives the stick of pot into his mouth, he does the penetration himself, plucking the stick from between extended fingers, fingers attached to a never visible face. Still it is once again the size of the homosexual's pot stick, or rather, his joint that intrigues the youth. He is literally blown away by the innate power of this king-sized bomber, reaching, in the process, a type of homoeroticized epiphany.

Then it comes—the tight feeling, like a rubber band being squeezed around your forehead. You feel your Adam's apple doing an up-an'-down act—gulp, gulp, gulp—and you feel great—great, dammit! So fine, so smooth. You like this feeling of being air-light, with your head tight. (P. 59)

Perhaps the most telling aspect of this rather remarkable scene in Thomas's narrative, is the fact that when he returns from what I will call his drug-induced orgasmic moment, he immediately sets about tidying up the mess that he has just described. I do not mean to suggest, however, that he denies the homosexual activity. On the contrary, the descriptions of the various acts taking place between men are rather straightforwardly rendered.

I tried to make me get up and move away from those squeezing fingers, but no good;. . . I pushed away at the fingers, but it grew independently. If I didn't like the scene, my pee-pee did. . . .

I dug the lie before me. Antonia was blowin' Waneko and Indio at the same time. Alfredo was screwing La Vieja. The springs on the bed were squeaking like a million mice. . . . Indio's face was white and scared and expectant, but his body was moving in time with Antonia's outrage. I tightened my own body. It was doing the same as Indio's. It was too late. I sucked my belly and felt the hot wetness of heat. I looked down in time to see my pee-pee disappear into Concha's mouth. I felt the roughness of his tongue as it both scared and pleased me. *I like broads, I like muchachas, I like girls*, I chanted inside me. . . . Then I heard

slurping sounds and it was all over. . . . I smelled the odor of shit and heard Alfredo say, 'Ya dirty *maricon*, ya shitted all over me.'

'I'm sor-ree,' said La Vieja, 'I no could help eet.'

'Ya stink'n faggot—'. . . I heard the last sounds of Alfredo's anger beating out against La Vieja—blap, blap, blap—and the faggot's wail, 'Ayeeeeeee, no heet me, no heet—' (P. 61)

We can see, in this passage, the reestablishment of the line separating the inside from the out at precisely the moment at which the spectacle of homosexual intercourse is realized most fully. Thomas maintains a distinction between himself and his sexual desire, producing, for a moment, the former as the victim of the latter. It is his "pee-pee" that refuses to allow him to exit this scene. Moreover, the word, pee-pee, with its connotations of childhood innocence, helps exonerate Thomas from any responsibility for the act in which he is engaged. Instead, by reasserting his genitalia as the privileged site of sexual pleasure, Thomas rescues himself from the never-never land of oral and anal eroticism. It is Concha, a name that can be translated as either shell or vagina, who steps to the nether side of the phallic economy, allowing his mouth to be "used" like the presumably (dis)empowered site of the vagina. Throughout, Thomas reminds himself that what he is experiencing is a lie. The satisfaction he feels is the product of a simple substitution, the mouth for the vagina, in which his pee-pee is fooled but he is not. He chants, "I like broads, I like *muchachas*, I like girls," as if to remind himself, in three different vernaculars, that the spectacle of his pee-pee within the homosexual's mouth is but a representation of, or perhaps, a signification upon the truth. And if this were not enough, the scene ends with the smell of the marijuana smoke giving way to the stench of shit, the proof that the boys have stumbled beyond the limits of normality, sullied themselves in the confusing, if always false, pleasures of the outside. As Alfredo beats *La Vieja*, the old woman, a man who despite his name is described as no more than thirty, the sexual and erotic economies seemingly have come back into order, the highly stylized—and stereotypical—rendering of *La Vieja's screams*: "Ayeeeeeee, no heet me, no heet—" acting as irrefutable evidence of the incommensurability of *el macho* with *la maricon*.

It is striking that even as Thomas paints the homosexual as the quintessential outsider, he seems incapable of dispensing with him. Homosexuals and homosexuality intervene throughout the text to help Thomas give definition to his fledgling masculinity. It is during their attempt to rob a gay nightclub, or rather a site in which there are nothing but "faggots and soft asses," that leads to Thomas's arrest and incarceration. The would-be robbers: Thomas, his friend, Louie, and their two white accomplices, Danny and Billy, are thwarted in their efforts, precisely because they underestimate the ability of the homosexual to turn their expectations and desires back in on themselves.

When Billy jumps to the stage and interrupts the drag show taking place, the audience refuses to respond in a fit of hysteria as he had expected. Instead they laugh, taking him for one of the performers. It is as if the sight of a poor, undereducated white man attempting to assert his masculinity, his lack of lack, is itself a greater spectacle than the transvestite performance. It is only after he fires two shots over their heads, shattering the mirrors in the process, that they give him their full attention, or rather reflect back the image of himself that he wants to see. Of course the entire affair is bungled. Thomas is shot by an undercover police officer whose own *incognito* status within the gay bar implicates him as fully in the transvestite spectacle as any of the drag performers. Indeed the whole scene turns upon the recognition that things are not always what they seem. The “women” on stage are not really women. Thomas is not really a macho gangster, but instead just a Puerto Rican teenager who when struck by the bullet of an *undercover* police officer reverts to an infantile state: “I felt like a little baby, almost like I was waiting to get my diapers changed” (p. 237). “Mommie . . . I don’t . . . Mommie, *no quiero morir*” (p. 238).

I have argued already that the prison acts as a primary site for the articulation of a late twentieth-century Black American masculinity. When the Black narrator enters prison he returns to the primal horde, as it were, a state in which the brothers are corralled together by the capricious violence and deprivation enacted by the father. Here the oedipal crisis has not been enacted, but only imagined. Thomas’s focus remains on the unattainable female, his former girlfriend, Trina, even though the truth of his situation is that homosociality has given way altogether to homosexuality.

the real action was between men. If you weren’t careful, if you didn’t stand up for yourself and say, ‘Hands off, motherfucker,’ you became a piece of ass. And if you got by this hassle, there always was the temptation of wanting to cop some ass. (P. 262)

We have reached the point in Thomas’s text when the danger—and the promise—of abjection become most apparent. In prison the rational norms no longer continue to operate. In spite of all his *corazon* and macho bravado, even Thomas is tempted to “cop some ass.”

We should be careful not to slip into the trap of conceptualizing abjection as simply the opposite of normality. The abject is not the same as the object. The relationship of abject to subject is similar to that of the inside to the out, only in that the abject is *not* the subject and indeed that it *may* hold a contradictory or even confrontational relationship to it. As Julia Kristeva argues, abjection “lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter’s rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject

does not cease challenging its master.”¹⁹ The danger that Thomas confronts, then, when he gives voice to his own nascent homosexual desire is not simply that he will implicate himself further as an outsider. On the contrary, the episode in the apartment of the three effeminate gay men had proven already that he could maintain his macho image even in the midst of homosexual intercourse. The danger is that he will lose hold on the logic of the inside/out binarism, that he might forget that his desire for Trina is real, while his “desire” for men is only a substitution.

*One time. That's all I have to do it. Just one time and it's gone time. I'll be screwing faggots as fast as I can get them. I'm not gonna get institutionalized. I don't want to lose my hatred of this damn place. Once you lose the hatred, then the can's got you. You can do all the time in the world and it doesn't bug you. You go outside and make it; you return to prison and you make it there, too. No sweat, no pain. No. Outside is real; inside is a lie. Outside is one kind of life, inside is another. And you make them the same if you lose your hate of prison.*²⁰

Thomas clearly sees the danger of blurring the distinction between the inside and the out. He is afraid to engage in (homo)sex not because it is displeasing, but because it will allow for the articulation—and actualization—of an alternate logic of pleasure. Prison becomes, in this schema, not simply the wretched underside of normal life, but an alternative site of meaning, truth, even love and life.

This is represented emblematically by two characters whom I will treat briefly here. The first, Claude, is a black man who is extremely attracted to Thomas and who offers his reluctant paramour a host of prison treasures if he will agree to be “his daddy-o.” Thomas refuses. Claude then takes up with another prisoner, Big Jules, a man sentenced to a life sentence for cutting someone up into little pieces. The couple celebrate their union in a wedding complete with preacher, best man and attendants.

The second is Ruben, a muscular and exceptionally violent inmate, who is attracted to Thomas’s “cousin,” Tico. The naive youth accepts Ruben’s many presents upon his arrival in prison until he receives a note from the older man, expressing his real intentions.

Dear Tico:

Since the first moment I saw you, I knew you were for me. I fell in love with your young red lips and the hair to match it. I would like to keep on doing things for you and to take care of you and not let anybody mess with you. I promise not to let no one know about you being my old lady and you don't have to worry none, because I won't hurt you none at all. I know you might think it's gonna be bad, but it's not at all. I could meet you in the back part of the tier cell hall and nobody's going to know

what's happening. I've been doing a lot for you and I never felt like this about no girl. If you let me cop you, I'll do it real easy to you. I'll use some hair oil and it will go in easy. You better not let me down 'cause I got it bad for you, I'd hate to mess you all up.

Love and Kisses

XXX

You know who

R.

P.S. Tear this up and flush it down the shit bowl.²¹

The most intriguing thing about Claude's desire for Thomas and especially Ruben's desire for Tico, particularly as it is represented within his note, is the fact that in both instances the emphasis is precisely *not* on sex, but instead on the production of a new type of (homosexual) romantic relationship. Claude wants not only an intercourse partner, but a husband, a daddy-o, one willing to express his commitment within a "public" ceremony. Moreover, one might argue that instead of pining away for some unattainable outside, some reality beyond his grasp, Claude empowers himself through the structures of the prison itself, subverting, in the process, the many constraints on his freedom. He refuses to understand Big Jules as solely a sadistic murderer, but instead reconfigures him as husband, lover, mate. Ruben, for his part, never even attempts to sever his tendency for violence from his love. He assures Tico that he will just as quickly "mess him up" as love him. Yet the highly romantic nature of his note is undeniable. Strikingly, his love for Tico does not begin at the penis or anus, but indeed at the lips and hair, the redness of which excite his passion. The beauty of the young man's red mouth and lips belies the necessity of the woman's (red) vagina. Ruben assures Tico, "I never felt like this for no girl" and then closes with a series of salutations that seem jarringly feminine and trite: Love and Kisses, XXX, You Know Who, R. He reminds Tico, in a postscript, to flush his note down the *shit* bowl, emphasizing once again the *counterrationality* of his desire.

III

I would like to turn, at this point, to the work of James Baldwin who achieves in his *Giovanni's Room* perhaps one of the most developed explications of the possibilities inherent within abjection yet written. The progress of Baldwin's early career might be narrated, in fact, as a series of successively more explicit and stark representations of the Black Abject, or as I will demonstrate below, the ghost of the homosexual. The whisper of adolescent longing for distant fathers and virile young men in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* gives way in *Another Country* to the tragically inverted "straight" man, Rufus, who, on the one hand, has passionate sex with his white girlfriend, a woman Cleaver refers to as a southern Jezebel, and, on the other, takes a white male

southern lover, or again to quote Cleaver, "lets a white bisexual homosexual fuck him in the ass."

To be "fucked" by the white man is not simply to be overcome by white culture, white intellect, white notions of superiority. Nor can it be understood solely as the undeniable evidence of the desire to be white. Instead Cleaver's fear is that Baldwin opens up space for the reconstruction of the Black imaginary, such that the most sacrosanct of Black "truths" might be transgressed. The image of the white (male) southerner raping the (unwilling) Black woman resonates with a long history of African-American literature and lore in which the licentious white man acts as the absolute spoiler of Black desire. The image of the white (Southerner) "making love to" the Black *man*, however, throws all this into confusion.

On the one hand, we see a rescripting of Frederick Douglass's famous account of the whipping of his aunt Hester. The Black male subject is no longer able to remain, in the closet, as it were; instead he takes the woman's place on the joist, becoming himself the victim of the white man's scourge. On the other, it seems that the white man needs not force his "victim" at all. The reader cannot find comfort in the idea that the image of the white male "abuse" of the Black male body is but a deeper revelation of white barbarism. The Black subject willingly gives himself, becoming in the process the mirror image of the culpable female slave whom Angela Davis has described so ably. One might argue, in fact, that the spectacle of interracial homosexual desire puts such pressure on the ideological structures of the Black national literary tradition that it renders the continuation of the inside/out binarism nearly impossible.

These are the issues that shape the narrative of Baldwin's second novel, *Giovanni's Room*. This work which is widely thought of as Baldwin's anomaly, the work with no Black characters, the work in which Baldwin stretches, some might say unsuccessfully, to demonstrate his grasp of the universal, has been neglected by both students of Black and gay literature, many of whom assume Baldwin had first to retreat from his Blackness in order to explore homosexuality and homophobia. I would argue, however, that the question of Blackness, precisely because of its very apparent absence, screams out at the turn of every page. As we have seen already, the *nonexistence* of the Black, particularly the Black homosexual, is a theme that Baldwin starts to develop as early as *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. My reading of *Giovanni's Room* will proceed, then, via an exploration of the absences in the text. I will suggest that Baldwin's explication of Giovanni's ghost-like non-presence, his non-subjectivity, parallels the absence of the Black from Western notions of rationality and humanity while at the same time pointing to the possibility of escape from this same Black-exclusive system of logic.

Baldwin initiates his discussion of race in the very first paragraph, alerting the reader that even though there are no Blacks present, this is yet a race novel:

I watch my reflection in the darkening gleam of the window pane. My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past.²²

There are a number of clues in this passage to alert the reader to the ideological work accomplished within Baldwin's text. His use of the autobiographical "I" both conflates his identity with that of his protagonist, David, and signals us that what he is interested in here is the subject of identity formation. David's consideration of his reflection, moreover, demonstrates Baldwin's fascination with the relationship of the Object to the Inverse, the One to the Other. David is indeed the *real life* (American) character who considers the fate of the already, or the almost already dead Giovanni. In the process, he faces away from Europe, away from whiteness, and from received notions of masculinity and sexuality to a nebulous darker past. Moreover, as Toni Morrison has recently suggested, the production of whiteness, American and otherwise, turns largely upon a complex process in which the Black is at once rendered invisible and omnipresent.²³

Like Cleaver, then, Baldwin's task in *Giovanni's Room* is to examine the relation of the Black to the white, the body to the mind. Indeed it is the desire for the Other's Body, in the person of Giovanni, that dictates the action of this text. Giovanni's nominally white, southern Italian body is bought and sold in the course of the novel. One might argue, in fact, that Giovanni becomes simply a creature of his body, a creature of sex and desire, by which other men are able to gauge their own humanity. That is to say, the paradox of the *male* homosexual is precisely that he usurps the woman's position as the site on which, or by which, fictional relationships between subjects are represented.

This explains why the central tragedy of the novel is the fact that Giovanni is never able to achieve his one true dream, the transcendence of the ideology of the corporeal: "Me, I want to escape . . . this dirty world, this dirty body. I never wish to make love again with anything more than the body."²⁴ It is not that Giovanni simply despises his flesh. On the contrary, he loves his flesh. It is the *idea* of his flesh, or rather, the fiction that his flesh represents that he so despises. He wishes to make love again, but only with his body, a body onto which others will no longer project notions of either filth and bestiality, or respectability and autonomy. Indeed Giovanni begins his process of pushing against the strictures of Western thought not in Paris, but in Italy where he leaves behind his wife after their failed attempt to produce a child, the marker of both husband and wife's authenticity within the patriarchal economy.

Giovanni struggles throughout not only to escape the position of the Other, but to produce a new identity, to move beyond the logic of self and other altogether. His work in Guillaume's bar, his relationship with David, and especially his squalid, over-crowded and never quite finished room are all testimony to his desire to achieve an alternative "realness," to enter the world of the living without becoming trapped there, to create a universe of his own making.

It is at this juncture that Baldwin's work so profoundly intersects with both Cleaver's and Thomas's. Like his heterosexually focused, heterosexist counterparts, Baldwin is concerned with both the body and the image of the body constructed by the white (European) mind. More importantly, all three men, even as they are divided by the yawning chasm of sexual desire and practice, give voice to the fear that the fiction of a pure heterosexuality no longer can be maintained, that the processes by which the "Black" male subject is imagined as autonomous, virile and invulnerable can no longer be rendered transparent. In each case, it is the homosexual who stands in for this concern, the homosexual who becomes the (scape)goat. It is almost as if the dissolution, in the gay body, of the strictures concerning "proper" Black male sexual desire and practice parallel the dissolution of a transparent Black American national consciousness. The homosexual is there when the "respectable" Black male protagonist gives way to the criminal Eldridge Cleaver. He stands by as Anglo-American-centered notions of race and "Blackness" are thrown into disarray by the Spanish-inflected "English" of the New York born Puerto Rican, Piri Thomas. Moreover, it is the search for the homosexual that drives the narrative of *Giovanni's Room*, a novel in which Baldwin, an author who has at times represented the apex of (Black) American liberal sentiment, abandons Black America, as it were, producing a text in which received racial thinking is inverted, if not *subverted*.

The character, Giovanni, might be read, in fact, as a rather odd and startling twist in Cleaver's notion of the Supermasculine Menial, the Black and immensely physical opposite of his Omnipotent Administrator. That is to say, the white bourgeoisie: the French Guillaume and the Belgian (American) Jacques, are competing constantly to claim both Giovanni's labor power and his sex, a process that necessarily restricts Giovanni to the realm of the corporeal and the dirty, and that creates him at once as both the brutalized Black male slave *and* the sexualized Black female slave. In this sense Giovanni has been dirtied, much as Puerto Rican boys are sullied with feces as they cross the line between the inside and the out, in their traffic with already marginal—and ambiguous—homosexuals. Indeed as Giovanni suggests, *the* central task of modern life is the struggle to rid oneself of the dirt:

what distinguished the men was that they seemed incapable of age; they smelled of soap, which seemed indeed to be their preservative against the dangers and exigencies of any more intimate odor. (P. 118)

Strikingly, cleanliness acts as the very definition of manhood in this passage. The men are *cleanly* delineated from women, *cleanly* established as members of a community, *cleanly* recognized as insiders and subjects.

The struggle for cleanliness, the denial of the body that might protect one from the dangers of intimate odor, is precisely the struggle that David faces when he looks into his darker past. He attempts throughout to maintain a *clean* masculinity, to maintain his sense of respectability even as he, much like Thomas's gang, is pulled ever more deeply into the dirty muck. David's immersion into the Parisian *demimonde* has as much to do with his desire to understand himself as *not* dirty, as *not* vulnerable and indeed as *not* homosexual as with any real affinity for the people by whom he finds himself surrounded.

Most of the people I knew in Paris were, as Parisians sometimes put it, of *le milieu* and while this milieu was certainly anxious enough to claim me, I was intent on proving, to them and to myself, that I was not of their company. I did this by being in their company a great deal and manifesting toward all of them a tolerance which placed me, I believed, above suspicion. (Pp. 32-33)

This precisely replicates the process of denial that I demonstrated in my discussion of *Soul on Ice* and *Down These Mean Streets*. Real identity, meaning heterosexual identity, is formed through concurrent acts of repression and projection. The homosexual non-subjects of *le milieu* not only reflect David's own subjectivity, creating him as a real man, they also stand in for the erasure of boundaries that render the entire real/not real logic unworkable.

David's abandonment of Giovanni for his female lover, Hella, a woman whom we only hear about in the second person until rather late in the novel, is both a demonstration of his heterosexuality *and* his authenticity. With Giovanni, David can only exist in the shadowy and confined spaces of back alley cafes, late night bars, and most especially Giovanni's cramped, suffocating and dishevelled room. It is this room, much like the gay men's apartment in Thomas's narrative, that acts as the marker of Giovanni's gallant, if quixotic, effort to construct a space for himself.

But it was not the room's disorder which was frightening; it was the fact that when one began searching for the key to this disorder, one realized that it was not to be found in any of the usual places. For this was not a matter of habit or circumstance or temperament; it was a matter of punishment or grief. (P. 115)

I think it important here that we not get stuck in a reading of this passage that would proceed solely from the assumption that the homosexual Giovanni has been punished for his efforts to break out of normality by being banished to the realm of "the never quite finished," "the always in process." That is not to

say that I intend to disallow this reading altogether. Instead I would suggest also that the joy that David and Giovanni are able to achieve, however briefly, is itself a product of this same disorder. "In the beginning our life together held a joy and amazement which was newborn every day" (p. 99). The attraction for both David and Giovanni is that they are obliged to recreate themselves—and the room—daily. Each has refused already to settle down. Both have left their "homelands." Both throw off the strictures of male heterosexuality. Moreover, both leave behind the mores and values of *le milieu*. Perhaps, then, the greatest tragedy—and the promise—of this work is that while David and Giovanni are cast out of the "mainstream" neither is able—or willing—to inhabit the margin. They are not the other, but the vehicles of the object.

It becomes impossible for either to claim status in the "real" world or even its underside. Giovanni cannot simply give in to the abuse and manipulation of Guillaume. Instead he kills him, creating himself as the marginal's marginal, the fugitive. Moreover, like both Cleaver and Thomas, he is eventually caught and incarcerated, remaining in prison until he undergoes the ultimate dissolution of the inside/out binarism, death. David has run away already from "America," which in this instance refers not simply to a geographical location, or a complex of political and social structures, but also to a patriarchal economy that produces maleness as the lack of lack, a fiction that David is never able to maintain. After the death of his mother, the family fiction is thrown into a profound crisis. His domineering aunt becomes the primary source of power and order in the household, re-embodying his father, in the process, such that the notion of masculine invulnerability is exploded. Indeed the tragedy that David brings with him from America is precisely that he both sees and knows his father. "Fathers ought to avoid utter nakedness before their sons. I did not want to know—not, anyway, from his mouth—that his flesh was as unregenerate as my own" (p. 26).

David can never go home again, as it were, to the wide open plains of America. And yet even as David attempts to create his (American) female lover, Hella, as a surrogate for his homeland, as he mounts one last desperate attempt to save himself, to create for himself an identity that can be seen and acknowledged within respectable (American) society, he is always haunted by the dual specters of Giovanni and his own homosexuality. David becomes himself a type of ghost, growing ever distant from Hella, retreating into a world of memory and denial to which she has no access.

And I look at my body, which is under sentence of death. It is lean, hard, and cold, the incarnation of a mystery. And I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries toward revelation. (P. 223)

Here again we see the reference to death, the site at which the distinctions between the inside and the out, the self and the other give way, allowing only

the articulation of ghost-like subjectivities. Strikingly, David's ghost body becomes inexplicable. He can no longer fashion a narrative by which to describe it. It is distinct from the self which remains a victim to a type of body logic that he cannot yet understand.

It is at this point that we can see most clearly the process by which the figure of the homosexual is conflated with the figure of the ghost, a process that occurs throughout the production of African-American literature and that is intimately tied to the production of the abject. The specter of the non-productive, unauthentic, weak, effeminate, and anti-social homosexual had not, it seems, been exorcised with the virulently homophobic diatribes of Eldridge Cleaver, nor even with the deaths of Rufus and Giovanni. In the process of creating the authentic Black subject, a process that necessarily involves concurrent practices of negation and projection, one has always to resurrect the ghost of the Black devil, as it were. That is to say, we must point to that which is unauthentic, base and perverse in order to adequately define the borders of Black "realness." At the same time, in the process of travelling through the underworld, the muck, the feces that is represented by the Black homosexual, we are able to access, if only briefly, new modes of understanding and existence that seem to wait just beyond our grasp. As a consequence, the Black abject never dies. On the contrary, it is only more deeply woven into the fabric of the Black American (literary) imagination. As David says of Giovanni, "in fleeing from his body, I confirmed and perpetuated his body's power over me. Now, as though I had been branded his body was burned into my mind, into my dreams" (p. 191).

I opened this essay with two epigrams: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk," and "*Chivo que rompe tambor con su pellejo paga*," or the goat who breaks the drum will pay with his hide. Both statements, taken from different, if not altogether dissimilar religious "texts," the Bible and the proverbs of the Cuban Abakua societies, reflect a profound concern with the question of perversity. To cook the goat in the same milk with which it has been nourished is to subvert a number of "self-evident" truths, among them the distinctions between right and wrong, inside and out, such that it becomes impossible to maintain the coherency of the society's logical order. Moreover, the very existence of the prohibition bespeaks the reality of a desire that stands outside of received logics. Indeed it may be perverse to eat the kid prepared with its mother's milk, but this does not make it less enjoyable.

That the concern with boundary crisis, with the goat's tendency to break out of its proscribed roles within society should be repeated among Cuban Yoruba-based religious groups reflects not only the intersection of Christianity with New World religions, but also and importantly the fact that the articulation of the perverse and the grotesque is absolutely necessary to the production of a variety of national cultures. As Coco Fusco has suggested, even while the Abakua proverb points directly to the grave consequences of

troublemaking,²⁵ it demonstrates the necessity of the untamed “outsider” to the continued creativity of the rest of the community. As James Baldwin’s Giovanni is slaughtered and as Thomas’ effeminate gay men are sexually tortured and beaten a type of music is produced, a music that points the way to new modes of existence, new ways of understanding, that allow the community to escape, however briefly, the systems of logic that have proven so enervating to the Black subject. The importance of the (scape)goat, then, is not so much that with its death peace returns to the village, or that crisis ends. The point is not simply to expurgate all that is ambiguous and contradictory. On the contrary, as the kid is consumed and the drum is beaten the community learns to gain pleasure from “the possibilities just beyond its grasp.” It receives proof of its own authenticity and insider status while leaving open a space for change, perhaps even the possibility of new forms of joy. The boundaries are for a moment reestablished, but all are certain, even hopeful, that once again they will be erased.

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

NOTES

- 1 Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985).
- 2 Diana Fuss, “Inside/Out,” Diana Fuss, ed., *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 3.
- 3 René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986).
- 4 See: Henry Louis Gates, *Figures in Black: Words, Signs and the “Racial” Self* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980).
- 5 Girard, pp. 15-16.
- 6 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982).
- 7 Paul Gilroy, “It’s a Family Affair,” Gina Dent, ed., *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), p. 312.
- 8 Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Laurel, 1968), p. 26.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 10 Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” *Black Scholar* 3.4 (December 1971):2-15.

- 11 Cleaver, p. 21.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 14 Quoted in Cleaver, p. 47.
- 15 See: Pat Shipman, *The Evolution of Racism: Human Differences and the Use and Abuse of Science* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).
- 16 Quoted in Shipman, p. 163.
- 17 See: John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of the Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983).
- 18 Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 50.
- 19 Kristeva, p. 2.
- 20 Thomas, p. 263.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- 22 James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (New York: Laurel, 1956), p. 7.
- 23 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992). See also: Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1990); David R. Reodiger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (New York: Verso, 1991); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993); Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974); Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women: Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: The Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993); Shelly Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993); George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro- American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).
- 24 Baldwin, p. 35.
- 25 Coco Fusco, "Pan-American Postnationalism: Another World Order," Gina Dent, ed., *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), pp. 279-84.